

TOP STORY: GIDGET GOES FEMINIST

May 30 - June 12, 1994

IN THE SETTIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

The Politics of "Natural" DISASTERS

An
essay
by
Theodore
Steinberg



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EDITORIAL

CLINTON'S SHOT AT A NEW WORLD ORDER

Unlike the wars in Bosnia and Rwanda, the Haitian crisis is a defining moment in Bill Clinton's presidency. For while the United States played no direct role in creating the situations in those two countries (other than promoting the international arms race), Washington has a long history of interference in the internal affairs of Haiti. The current Haitian ruling class, the police and the army are all creatures of an American policy designed to lock the vast majority of Haitians into their role as a cheap source of labor for corporate investors. The United States has a special responsibility for the situation there, and Clinton, who talks so much about democracy, must now demonstrate whether he will defend democratic principles in Haiti or remain loyal to the corporate sponsors he has thus far served so faithfully.

Until last month, the answer was clear. While Clinton offered tepid rhetorical support to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, administration policy all but guaranteed that Aristide, ousted in a 1991 military coup, would remain a president-in-exile. But the blatant slaughter of Aristide supporters in Haiti and the plight of Haitians fleeing for their lives created a popular demand—led by the Congressional Black Caucus, several unions and a group of Hollywood celebrities—to back up words with muscle. Sensitive to public pressure, Clinton moved to strengthen the embargo against Haiti, and he began talking about the use of force to unseat Aristide's usurpers.

On the face of it, Clinton has precedents galore for intervention. Over the past 150 years, the United States has sent the Marines into virtually every country in Latin America and the Caribbean. And where it hasn't intervened directly, it has organized, armed and directed coups, invasions and civil wars. Since the end of World War II, Guatemala, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Nicaragua, Grenada and Panama have been the targets of Democratic and Republican administrations alike.

But without exception, these earlier interventions, made in the name of democracy—and, during the Cold War, anti-communism—have been designed to protect American capital and

its local allies. Thus, when the Nixon administration was planning a coup against Chile's Socialist President Salvador Allende, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said: "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people." Allende was then overthrown and tens of thousands of Chileans were murdered or disappeared.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the idea of another U.S. invasion is opposed by most Latin Americans, and even by Aristide, who has good reason to fear a prolonged American occupation. The people of Latin America and the Caribbean don't trust the United States. Moreover, many Latin American rulers, allied with their ruling classes, don't like the idea of Washington helping a champion of working people get back into office.

But America's official democratic ideology haunts the White House. The more public debate there is, the more difficult it will be for Clinton not to act. Since the Haitian military appears certain to hold on to its power unless forced out by an invasion, Clinton may be forced into unprecedented military action in support of a truly popular revolution in this hemisphere.

It will be difficult to do this without losing international support, but not impossible. The solution, as Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) suggests, is military action to arrest the top officers of the Haitian army and police, combined with a guarantee that there will be no prolonged American occupation. Instead, the invasion would be followed immediately by a large international peacekeeping force, excluding Americans, which would allow Aristide to re-establish order and to build

the country's political institutions and economy along democratic lines.

Militarily, this would be a simple action. Haiti's 7,000-man army is good at murdering civilians, but is ill-equipped, poorly trained and has no popular support. Maintaining the occupying force's neutrality would be more difficult, given the historical record. This force should direct its attention toward helping create a new police establishment under civilian control and toward helping

***Military action
to put Aristide
back into office
would be an
unprecedented
act of support
for popular
revolution in
this hemisphere.***

rebuild the country's infrastructure.

If Clinton has the courage to follow this path, he will finally have taken a step toward a genuinely new world order. ◀

IN THESE TIMES
 "...with liberty and justice for all"

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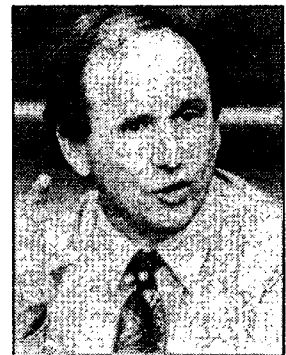
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LETTERS

True story

Although I was generally pleased with the way Joel Bleifuss ("Who leaked Whitewater?" *ITT*, May 2) reduced and reported the tangled history of my case—the first, to the best of my knowledge, to prove that leaks of classified material came from the Justice Department's own Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR)—I was not a little disturbed to see the case used to support the larger, surrounding theme of the article, namely, that leaks from OPR help answer the question: "How and why did Whitewater enter center stage of the nation's political debate?"

Whitewater leaks may well have come from OPR—and my case certainly adds credence to that conjecture. But it is doubtful at the least that any such leaks go far toward explaining our present concern over the cluster of issues we call "Whitewater." Well

before those leaks, reporters from the *New York Times* to the *Los Angeles Times* descended on Arkansas, where they have unearthed enough information to put to rest Bleifuss' casual observation that Whitewater "seems close to running itself out," much less that "there is nothing much to the story—there never was."

None of which detracts from the problem of OPR, on which Bleifuss has focused some much-needed light.

Roger Pilon
Washington, D.C.

Off the deep end

Joel Bleifuss, in his effort to uncover the abuses in the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility (*ITT*, May 2), goes a bit overboard when he states that former FBI Director William Sessions "had a reputation

as an honest public servant." Those of us who were active in the Central America Solidarity Movement in the '80s know better.

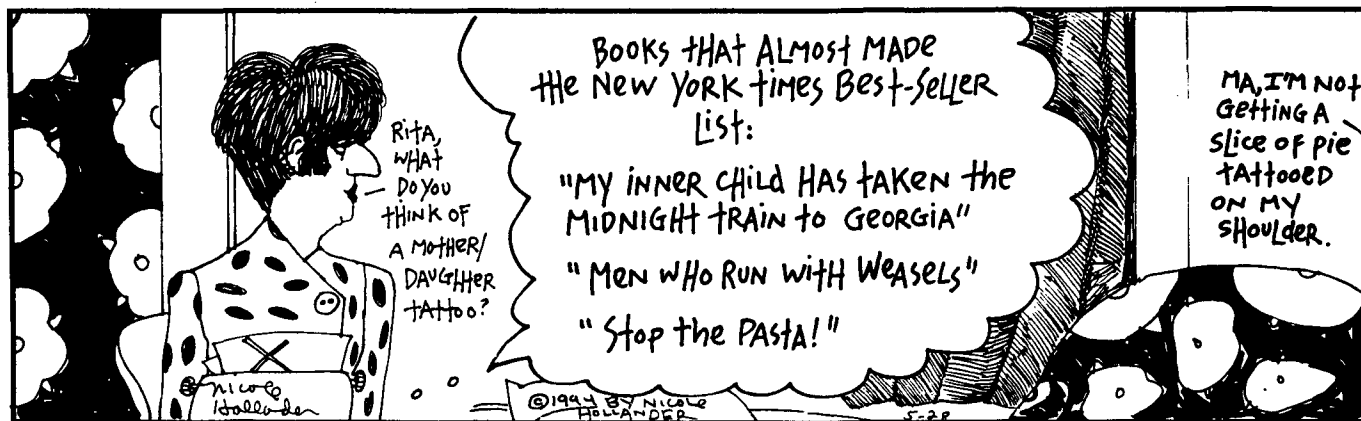
During these years, solidarity groups were subject to a series of suspicious break-ins at offices across the country. The pattern was always the same: documents were shuffled through or taken, but money and office equipment were left untouched. Eventually, a Salvadoran émigré in Dallas went public with the charge that he had been asked by the FBI to infiltrate a church group that was providing sanctuary to refugees. This led to congressional hearings by the constitutional rights subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee. At these hearings, Sessions testified that there had been no infiltration whatsoever.

After more evidence came out, Sessions was called again to testify, this time under oath. In this testimony he stated that there had been investigations of solidarity groups, all of which were the result, directly or indirectly, of misinformation passed along by the Dallas émigré. He also stated that after a thorough review of the data obtained in these investigations, they were brought to an end in June 1985, when it was determined that these groups were engaged in legal political activity.

Again, Sessions lied. Through the Freedom of Information Act, I obtained documents that show the FBI was maintaining surveillance on the Ann Arbor-based solidarity movement at least through June of 1986 (this evi-

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



dence is available upon request). It is unlikely that the Ann Arbor movement was uniquely privileged in receiving FBI attention. In other words, Sessions did everything in his ability to conceal the extent of FBI spying in this matter.

This may pass for honesty in the context of Washington politics, but it does not correspond to the ordinary usage of the word. Sessions is a liar. His charges against OPR may be true, but that isn't a reason to make the guy a hero.

Dean Baker
Washington, D.C.

Flawed reasoning

As a historian who studies drug control law, my understanding of alcohol Prohibition differs from that expressed in a letter by Don Sloan (*ITT*, March 21). Federal Prohibition law allowed people to buy, possess and consume beverage alcohol. Today such a legal status would be described as "decriminalization." Prohibition attacked alcohol *commerce*, not use. Manufacturers and dealers, not users, were the targets of Prohibition agents.

I find Prohibition's effect on public health to have been ambiguous. The same sorts of changes in alcohol consumption (presumably leading to changes in public health) also occurred at that time in foreign jurisdictions not subject to U.S. laws. Therefore, we do not know if Prohibition caused the changes in the United States.

Richard Lawrence Miller
Kansas City, Mo.

OCAW endorses single-payer

Our union endorsed the single-payer approach to national health care in 1989 because of these key features, which none of the other approaches have: Single-payer is fair. It's simple. It's universal. And it's comprehensive.

The American people understand that, too. That's why poll after poll show they favor the single-payer solution. And that's why more than a million people in California signed up to put a single-payer initiative on the ballot.

Single-payer just makes the most sense—period. With it, we all know what we will get: coverage forever for everyone. Poor, rich and in between; employed or unemployed; sick or healthy. And we know that everything will be covered: prescription drugs, pre-natal to long-term care, checkups, preventive care, catastrophic care.

We also know who our health care providers will be, because it's our choice: our own doctors, hospitals, specialists. No co-payments, no deductibles, no hassle.

Finally, we know what we'll pay, and for 75 percent of us it'll be less than we now pay. But we won't be paying it to the 1,500 private insurance companies who rake in billions of dollars in profits from health insurance premiums and waste billions more in the process. By eliminating the premiums, the co-payments, deductibles and items the insurance companies don't cover, we'll end up with more care, better care and less expensive care.

So why all the "confusion"? The answer's simple, too. The alternative proposals are complicated and complex because they attempt to hide the fact that they're designed to keep the insurance industry in control, so that the biggest insurance companies, drug companies and others can keep profiting from our \$1 trillion-a-year health care system.

Today the government-funded single-payer solution—fair, simple, universal, comprehensive—is right where it should have been all along: squarely in the middle of the debate. The American people aren't stupid. They understand it because it's right. And they know it will work.

Robert Wages
President

Oil, Chemical and Atomic
Workers International Union

Alternative, please

Angus Taylor's criticism of the New Democratic Party, as well as social democracy in general (*ITT*, May 2), is well taken. However, Taylor's lament, typical of left critics of social democracy, rings hollow in the absence of any real alternative—i.e., what evidence is there that democratic socialists (as distinguished from social democrats) would or could have done any better? Transforming the system root and branch, as Taylor puts it, is obviously the goal of the socialist movement; yet at the moment most of our brightest admit we have no foreseeable, *pragmatic* way of getting there from here. The social democrats, warts and all, have at least been trying.

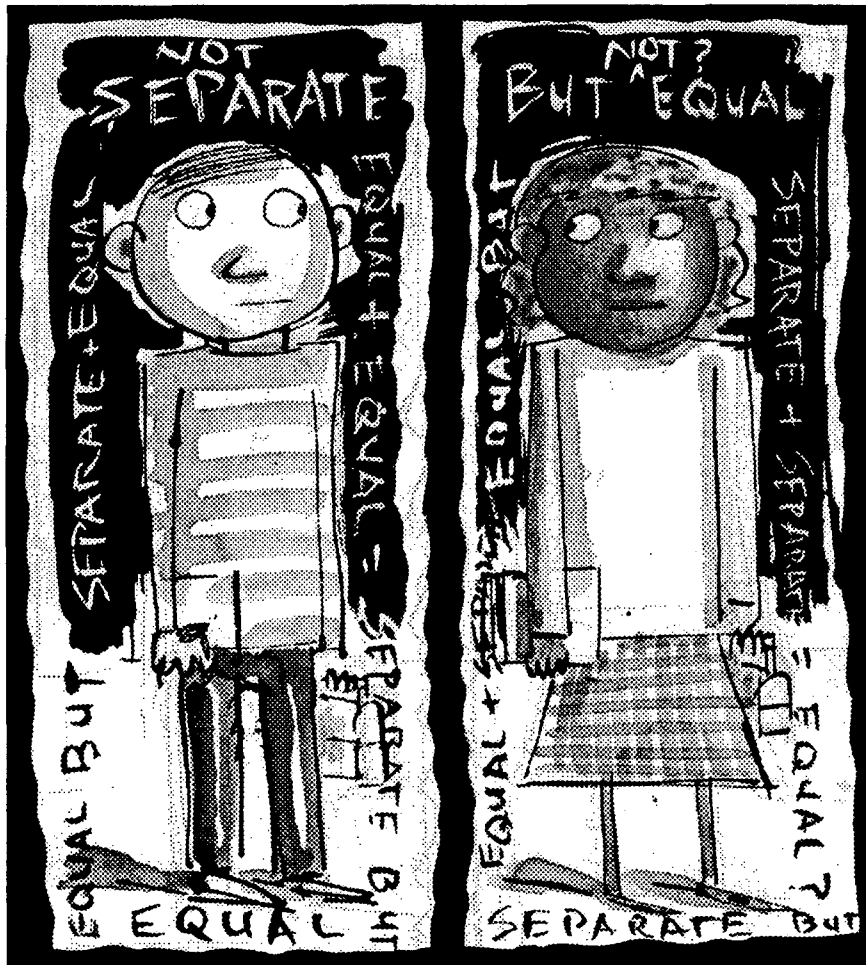
I spoke with Audrey MacLaughlin shortly before she resigned as leader. She acknowledged the internal problems of the party, saying, "Everything is on the table. ... We're examining all of our sacred cows." Yet she also raised the point that the media has served as an extra-political enemy of the party—scarcely giving it room to breathe, let alone govern. That point is surely validated when one looks at recent elections in Britain and Italy, where the media was successfully used by its owners to attack a left opposition on the verge of victory.

As socialists, democratic socialists, radicals and, yes, even social democrats, we are all engaged in a struggle against the same old adversary. Now more than ever, we need to find a tolerant solidarity to unite rather than divide us. Otherwise we risk losing even the small gains made by social democracy while we pursue the democratic socialist ideal.

Andrew Hammer
Editor, *Socialist*
New York

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

InSHORT



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BROWNOUT

American apartheid was fatally wounded 40 years ago when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in the case of *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place." In a ruling that set the stage for the civil rights revolution, the court declared on May 17, 1954, that "separate facilities are inherently unequal."

Much has changed for the better since then. But public schools are as segre-



By Woody Igou

Nasty Solution

Animal-rights advocates in Boston launched a petition drive to end the practice of bear "farming" in China. It is believed that 5,000 Asiatic



black bears are imprisoned in small cages with permanent metal tubes inserted

in their gallbladders to extract bile. The fluid is used as a folk medicine for a variety of common ailments.

The West sees nature as something to be conquered; the East sees it as something to be eaten.

19 years of solitude

A Honduran peasant, 57-year-old Gustavo Amador, was recently freed after spending 19 years in prison for stealing colored pencils from a mar-



ket. He was convicted in 1975 and acquitted in 1976, but the written release did not arrive at

the central prison where Amador was held for the next 18 years.

Don't be surprised if he runs back in.

Generation X'ed

An ear-piercing clinic at a Lebanon, Pa., mall pierced the

ears of an 11-month-old girl who was brought in by her 16-year-old mother but refused to pierce the mother's ears. The owner



explained that the infant had her mother's permission but he could not

pierce the mother's ears because she was under 18 and needed her mother's permission.

"Yes, you can sleep with my daughter without birth control, but don't let me catch you near those ears!"

The Info-Autobahn

A Montreal woman has claimed in a lawsuit that three and a half hours after a hospital's diagnosis that she had skin cancer, she received



a call from the Alfred Dellaire Funeral Home offering their services. The suit claims that

the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal allowed the funeral home immediate access to her records.

Free sun block with every coffin purchased.

Stunned by a stupid statement? Nauseated by a noxious news item? Livid about a ludicrous lie?

Contact the Appall-O-Meter, In These Times, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647

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8. Pyongyang on my mind
9. Disavowed by Bosnian Serbs
10. Murry, Melt the Polar Cap!

gated today as they were in the days before *Brown*. That's no mystery: children go to school near their homes, and in 1994, four decades after the fall of legal segregation, few black Americans live in white neighborhoods. Residential segregation remains as rigid as ever, and in many areas it has increased dramatically.

"No group in the history of the United States has ever experienced the sustained high level of residential segregation that has been imposed on blacks in large American cities for the past 50 years," write Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton in their recent book *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. (See ITT, Feb. 17, 1994 and Aug. 23, 1993.) "The effect of segregation on black well-being is structural, not individual. Residential segregation lies beyond the ability of any individual to change; it constrains black life chances irrespective of personal traits, individual motivations, or private achievements." The two warn that unless Americans "recognize the crucial role of America's own apartheid in perpetuating urban poverty and racial injustice, the United States will remain a deeply divided and very troubled society."

Today, though, few still share the enthusiasm for the ideal of integration. Indeed, some of the strongest resistance to integration is coming from African-Americans. There is a growing consensus among many black organizers and theorists that the quest for integration has diverted African-Americans from developing a more productive self-reliance.

These integration opponents argue, contrary to Massey and Denton, that racial isolation has negative consequences only if the isolated group lacks economic and political control. They contend that cultural and spatial segregation has always been, and will always be, a fact of American life. The problem is, as they see it, that African-Americans have been denied self-determination—and that blacks, while denied access to the mainstream, had more autonomy in the days before *Brown*.

According to Harold Cruse, the author of the 1987 work *Plural But Equal*, "the progress of racial integration as public policy can be seen as a process that has left the majority of the black population stranded and stalled at the edges of power while the inner sanctums were protected from change."

Cruse notes that the implementation of *Brown* in the South "eliminated black teachers, black principals, black administrators, a whole generation of experienced administrative public school personnel made superfluous by integration." Corroborating Cruse is a report by the Race Relations Information Center in Nashville, which notes that in the year after *Brown* was implemented southern and border states lost more than half of their black principals and some 6,000 black teachers.

In Cruse's view, evidence like this shows that "a totally irresponsible and romantic black leadership [has] allowed the nebulous issue of integration to eliminate one of the natural foundations of political leverage in the coming struggle for black political power."

Integration has also been criticized for the unintentionally devastating effect it has had on African-American communities. During the years of strict residential segregation, African-Americans from a wide range of classes and professions were forced into intimate association in the same neighborhoods. Black organizations, religious institutions and commercial enterprises catered to African-Americans from many walks of life. Their close proximity promoted a shared sense of purpose and a more inclusive collective identity.

But, according to critics of integration, the civil rights movement induced many working- and middle-class blacks to leave their neighborhoods seeking whiter, previously forbidden pastures. Unfortunately, their exodus left those communities bereft of the leadership and stability they once provided. The result has been accelerated decay in too many black communities.

Proponents of this argument blame integration precisely for what Massey blames on segregation. But despite the controversy surrounding the issue of integration, it is hard to deny *Brown's* salutary social effects. Before the 1954 ruling started the dominoes falling, the barriers of racial segregation effectively excluded African-Americans from any meaningful exercise of national citizenship.

From this distance the quest for integration is easy to caricature as a misguided search for white approval. But in the context of the civil rights struggle, the word is just a euphemism for access. And since African-Americans have more access to mainstream status than ever before, the changes wrought by the Supreme Court's historic 1954 ruling of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* are indeed worthy of commemoration.

—Salim Muwakkil

A BIG TEST ON CAPITOL HILL

Legislation prohibiting employers from hiring permanent replacements for strikers—a practice that effectively negates workers' legal right to strike without retaliation—is coming down to the wire. It's a big test for organized labor, but it's an even bigger test of Bill Clinton.

A majority of senators support the legislation, which has already passed the House. But as *In These Times* went to press, Senate backers were still two or three votes shy of the 60 votes needed to block a filibuster by opponents of the bill. A vote on the legislation had been set for mid-May, but was delayed because of Capitol Hill's preoccupation with health reform. Now the vote appears likely to come in early June.

With swing senators proposing compromises, it's unclear how much the legislation will be altered. Some of the proposed amendments would exempt employers of 300 or fewer workers (which means 95 percent of all manufacturing establishments), limit protection to 30 days (which means most employers could simply wait until the 31st day before hiring permanent replacements), or grant protection against permanent replacements only on the first contract or if employers were demanding concessions.

Grass-roots pressure may finally swing the deal, but without full commitment from the president the legislation seems precarious. As one labor lobbyist said, "Clinton is the wild card on this one."

—David Moberg

WE'RE NO. 1

In an apparent backlash against new demands for curricular inclusiveness, the school board in Lake County, Fla., recently adopted a policy requiring the public schools to teach that American culture is "superior" to all others, according to Rick Badie of the *Orlando Sentinel*. The originator of the policy, school board chairwoman Pat Hart, maintains that her policy simply promotes pride, not arrogance—or, heaven forbid, racism. "When I say 'supe-

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

Watching them watching us

Need to find out which environmental groups support which issues? Who funds a media watchdog organization? What head of a consumer group sits on which boards of directors? Do your research the way corporate leaders do: look in the Foundation for Public Affairs' *Public Interest Profiles*, an annual directory that tracks around 1,300 public interest and advocacy organizations. The publication caters largely to corporations threatened by such advocacy, according to the impressive new newsletter *PR Watch*. (See *ITT*, Oct. 4, 1993.) The Foundation, part of the Public Affairs Council, a corporate public-relations trade association, also hosts a conference on advocacy groups' strategies, regularly attended by corp-and-conglom execs. (This year's conference takes place on November 3 and 4, in Washington.) At least it's nice to know that corporate America thinks public interest advocates' strategies are worth studying. (*PR Watch* can be reached at 3318 Gregory St., Madison, WI 53711, 608-233-3346.)

Under construction

The information superhighway continues to be an elegant metaphor in search of a referent. Soon after the megadeal between Bell Atlantic and TCI—the harbinger of "convergence," in which the phone, TV and computer would merge—fell

apart, so did several other phone company-cable company deals.

Now, the plans of video supercompany Blockbuster to merge with Viacom-Paramount are going bust, as the value of Viacom's stock declines. Despite grand talk of pioneering the post-home-video age, Blockbuster may go on for a while making money the old-fashioned way: renting videos to consumers who drive up to the door on those old-fashioned concrete highways.

New technologies will, inevitably, create new communications pathways, but nothing guarantees that the public will get a "superhighway"—a network that allows everyone to be heard and seen as well as to watch and listen. Still, this lull in corporate deal-making may give respite to public interest advocates struggling to promote and protect non-commercial telecommunications activities.

TV addiction

The Canadian-based Media Foundation has had an uphill struggle trying to get TV outlets to run its ads critical of TV—several of which portray viewers as victims of addiction.

Nonetheless, the creators of children's software for computers seem to like the idea. The makers of Crayola along with Micrografx have released ads with opening lines such as "Hi, my name is Travis, and I'm an addict." The ads try to show that interactive software is better for kids than TV and video games.

© 1994 Pat Aufderheide

rior," Hart explains, "it means that America is a cut above the rest, even with the faults, failures and successes. ... It's not the color of the person in power. It's the principles that they have. Our children need to be taught to appreciate our country's principles." The teachers' union is not exactly convinced: they're threatening to sue.

For their part, school officials are insisting that they are *already* eminently patriotic. "I don't know how we can teach any more love of country and patriotism than we are now teaching," the *Sentinel* quoted one administrator as saying. "Hopefully, we'll get some more direction on this so we can get a program in place by the next school term." With a little elbow grease and some all-American know-how, that shouldn't be too much of a problem.

—David Futrelle

FRESH AIR ON THE AIRWAVES

Jim Hightower, the left's answer to Rush Limbaugh, has a new radio forum for his high-spirited brand of populist politics. In mid-May, the former Texas agriculture commissioner debuted his new long-format, call-in talk show on 100 ABC radio stations. (Check with your local ABC affiliate.) In addition to the ABC program, which runs for three hours every Saturday and Sunday, Hightower will continue to air his independently produced two-minute commentaries on 76 stations across the country.

Those worried that Hightower's move to the network will affect his politics can rest easy. His first broadcasts on May 14 and 15 dealt with such topics as the single-payer health plan, the plight of the Haitian people and the case for legalizing marijuana. Hightower told listeners that unlike Bill Clinton, he inhaled—and enjoyed it.

"I don't just want to get people agitated," says Hightower. "I want to get them agitating."

—Miles Harvey

ROUGH CUTS

By JA Reid



I N P E R S O N



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DON'T FENCE HER IN

k.d. lang sings the cowgirl blues

that govern the music industry, believing that they contribute to a deadening social and cultural uniformity.

She came out last year as a lesbian—then appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, dressed as a man, with a scantily clad Cindy Crawford. The singer has

Like e.e. cummings before her, k.d. lang disavows tradition and order. She finds her own rhythms. As a musician, she resists categorization. She abhors the rigid formats and restrictive classifications

ETC.

By Miles Harvey

After the flood

A year ago, the waters of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers were rising sharply as the Midwest was being deluged by rain. We all know what happened next. A federally built system of dams and levees—supposedly fail-safe—failed. Floods swept through the Midwest, causing an estimated \$12 billion in damages. For taxpayers, the flood represents a double-whammy of failed federal policy. Taxpayers have paid billions over the last half-century to have the dams and levees erected. With these costly structures came Uncle Sam's guarantee that the Mississippi and Missouri could be controlled, that low-lying areas along their banks—wetlands and flood plains—could be developed and farmed. Uncle Sam was, of course, wrong. Yet now Washington is coming back to taxpayers again, asking them to pay for damages in these same low-lying areas.

Will the problem keep repeating itself? Will Washington simply rebuild the levees while developers rebuild on the flood plains? David R. Conrad, a water resources specialist for the National Wildlife Federation, hopes not. "I think we're beginning to see a sea change of attitude toward the long-prevalent notion that we can overcome natural flooding with man-made contrivances," he says.

The Clinton administration got off to a bad start in its approach to the flood, says Conrad. Of the \$6 billion appropriated for disaster relief, only \$25 million was initially earmarked for buyout

and relocation of badly damaged buildings.

But the White House and Congress have now taken steps to correct that imbalance, dedicating as much as \$750 million for buyouts and relocations. In addition to that, the administration has earmarked as much as \$300 million to purchase damaged croplands for restoration to wetlands in the upper Mississippi basin flood plain.

As of April 25, the Federal Emergency Management Agency had approved the acquisition for relocation or demolition of 4,181 structures at an estimated cost of \$77 million.

Overall, Conrad gives President Clinton high marks "for getting things started in the right direction in the wake of the Midwest flood." Ultimately, however, he believes that Washington cannot and should not provide all the answers.

"Over the course of the last 50 years, the federal government has spent somewhere between \$30 and \$50 billion on flood control, and yet throughout that period, annual average flood damages have continued to rise nationally at an alarming rate," he observes.

Instead of building new dams and levees, he says, the solution lays in protecting flood plains and wetlands from development. And that, he stresses, is the responsibility of state and local government.

True, "state and local governments are notorious for succumbing to pressures from developers." But they must learn restraint, according to Conrad. Otherwise, we're in for more wasted billions—and more devastating floods.

become an icon of empowerment for many young women—especially lesbians. But image matters less to lang than whether she is able to retain the freedom and power to do what she pleases. Her life and art crystallize an essential debate in modern times—pitting the artist's need for self-expression against the industry's insistence on control and self-preservation.

She has won three Grammys, successfully negotiating the intricate balance between popular and critical support. "I think winning awards is a good feeling," lang said during an interview in Toronto. "But it doesn't give you any security. Being an artist is definitely an insecure feeling. You're constantly struggling with the need to create. [My work] isn't about selling records or winning awards."

Born Kathy Dawn Lang, she grew up in Alberta, Canada, and in her early years displayed prodigious music and composition skills. In the early '80s, she fronted a band called the reclines. With the albums *Angel with a Lariat* (1986) and *Shadowland* (1987), she patented an expressive, beguiling sound built on themes of yearning and desire. Her breakthrough commercial album, *Absolute Torch and Twang* (1989), earned her the Grammy for best female country vocalist. The 1992 *Ingermue*, a beautiful and melancholy work, represented a shift from a strict country style to a sound influenced by rhythm and blues. The album featured her first significant crossover hit, "Constant Craving." Her last two albums were written and scored in collaboration with Canadian composer and musician Ben Mink.

She is a virtual multimedia empire. St. Martin's Press has just issued the new biography, *k.d. lang: all you get is me*, by journalist Victoria Starr. Percy Adlon's 1991 German/Canadian feature, *Salmonberries*, about the relationship of an East German librarian and an Alaskan woman, played by lang, is currently available on videocassette.

Most recently, Gus Van Sant's funky, idiosyncratic adaptation of Tom Robbins' 1976 counterculture novel, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, opened May 20. Again collaborating with Mink, lang composed the plaintive, spare music score that beautifully dovetails with Van Sant's vision of the frontier story of Sissy Hankshaw (Uma Thurman) and her wanderings across America. The soundtrack was released by Sire Records last fall and includes seven previously unreleased vocal tracks by lang.

The film's soundtrack is but a further development of lang's ideas and theories of how music should be used with other art forms. "I don't think there's any difference to creating," she says. "Creating is creating. When I met with Gus, we just started to explode with ideas and it filtered out and I dragged Ben into it. Ben and I watched the film several times and got to know the characters, and then we talked about what kind of music we wanted to use. We didn't want to go strictly country."

Van Sant and lang's work has a powerful symmetry: they explore the lives of people caught up in self-discovery and sexual experimentation, lives torn apart by relationships that cannot be consummated. "This work seemed more accessible to me as an artist. I like the concept, and I liked the idea I would be able to do country again with an excuse," says lang.

"At times I was very intimidated. It's a big job. I don't think I'll ever do it again. There are a couple of scenes where we saw things completely different from Gus, and that's a difficult process. It's somebody else's art, and you're trying to fit into that."

—Patrick Z. McGavin

T H E F I R S T S T O N E

The 21st FinCENtury

By Joel Bleifuss

An obscure federal agency, unknown even to many members of Congress, may soon have the capability to access the complete financial history of any U.S. citizen via a colossal computer network.

This "database of databases" is operated by the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, FinCEN for short. A division of the Treasury Department, it was established in April 1990 to help wage the war against drugs by tracking the flow of narcotics money. Currently the agency has a staff of 200 and a budget of \$20 million. It operates quietly out of its headquarters in Vienna ("Spook City"), Va., down the road from the Central Intelligence Agency's main office in McClean.

Law enforcement officials hail FinCEN as a technological breakthrough that makes it difficult for criminals to hide ill-gotten financial gains. So far, FinCEN's computer system has proven a successful tool for catching big-time drug dealers. And when the CIA recently fingered Russian spy Aldrich Ames, it was with the aid of FinCEN. FinCEN also helped to compile the evidence used to convict the Islamic extremists who bombed the World Trade Center.

Civil libertarians, however, see the specter of Big Brother. Though FinCEN must follow clearly defined procedures before it can start electronic snooping, critics fear that the system could be abused and safeguards disregarded. They worry that information culled from FinCEN databases could be used for political ends, particularly since FinCEN and the U.S. intelligence community are inextricably interconnected. Those fears are not lessened by the fact that FinCEN is the brainchild of Norman Bailey, who was senior director of national security planning at the National Security Council under the Reagan and Bush administrations. Bailey was a close associate of former CIA chief William Casey, whose disregard for constitutional government was a defining feature of the Reagan administration.

Anthony Kimery, an editor at American Banker Newsletters, attended the champagne reception that launched FinCEN four years ago. He has been covering it since. In the December 1993 *Wired*, Kimery provided the first journalistic overview of FinCEN, which he describes as "the only federal unit devoted solely to the systematic collation and cross-analysis of law-enforcement, intelligence and public databases."

Earlier this year the Paris-based *Intelligence Newsletter*, an industry publication of the espionage community, devoted two consecutive cover stories to what it termed a "financial data vacuum cleaner." The newsletter described FinCEN as "one of the world's most technology-intensive and least-known intelligence services."

So what can FinCEN's computers do?

Kimery describes the agency as "a one-of-a-kind cauldron containing all the available financial intelligence in the United States." *Intelligence Newsletter* reports that FinCEN consolidates information found in a wide variety of databases. These include:

- The Financial Data Base (FDB). This database contains all the records that banks and other financial institutions have been filing under the Bank Secrecy Act for the last 23 years. FDB records consist largely of Currency Transaction Reports (CTRs), which are the reports that must be filed when business deals involve sums in excess of \$10,000. There are various kinds of CTRs, including International Transportation of Currency or Monetary Instruments Reports, Currency Transaction Reports by Casinos and the Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts Reports. Also included in the FDB are more than 50 million CTRs contained in the Internal Revenue Service's Currency and Banking Database. And the FDB contains all reports of suspicious financial transactions collected by FinCEN.

- Treasury Enforcement and Control System. Managed by the U.S. Customs Service, this system compiles information to create a financial profile of people who are suspected of trafficking in drugs.

- Source Data Base. FinCEN created this database to hold all the information obtained from its computer investigations. In 1992, for example, about 12,000 people and institutions were investigated by FinCEN, according to Kimery.

- Undercover Money Laundering Investigations Data Base. Law enforcement agencies funnel information from ongoing investigations into this system to ensure that they don't mistakenly investigate each other's undercover operations.

- Criminal Referral Data Base. This system contains the criminal referral forms that financial institutions are required to file with FinCEN whenever they uncover activities they suspect are illegal.

- Automated Money Laundering Case Information

System. This database analyzes information from closed money laundering cases in order to identify trends and patterns in money laundering.

At least 35 other kinds of data systems are currently accessed by FinCEN. These include real estate records, driver's license information, credit bureau data and insurance company records. According to Kimery, FinCEN plans to expand this database "by potentially 100 other databases."

These databases contain information on all Americans, as will a new computer file FinCEN wants to establish, a national info-network called the Deposit Tracking System (DTS). Kimery reports that DTS would involve the creation of a \$12.5 million computer system "that could be used to penetrate the security of bank accounts belonging to you, me and 388 million other bank account holders in the U.S." The bankers and civil libertarians are against it. The cops and spies are for it.

Whether the DTS becomes reality is up to Congress. More certain are FinCEN's plans to establish an Artificial Intelligence/Massive Parallel Processing program that will be booted up in a couple of years. This system will interface with the other FinCEN databases and, through the genius of its artificial intelligence, ferret out criminally connected financial transactions. This would supplement FinCEN's already operating artificial intelligence system. *Intelligence Newsletter* reports that KGB mole Ames' irregular banking habits were discovered by FinCEN's artificial-intelligence programs.

In tracking the money that supported the World Trade Center bombers, FinCEN hooked into the CIA's "terrorist" database, known as DESIST. Similar interface occurs between FinCEN and the CIA's anti-drug trafficking operation, the Counter Narcotics Center.

On the international front, according to *Intelligence Newsletter*, FinCEN cooperates with a few international counterparts in France, Britain and Australia, and the global cop shop Interpol. Interestingly enough, the chief of Interpol's U.S. National Central Bureau, Shelley Altenstadter, was the former deputy director of FinCEN.

Obviously, FinCEN has enormous potential—for law enforcement and for abuse.

As *Intelligence Newsletter* reported, "FinCEN has turned up banking records that show unexplained surges in income for several high-level CIA and FBI officials as well as officials of other American intelligence services, including the Defense Intelligence Agency." Further, according to the

newsletter, U.S. intelligence agencies have requested that FinCEN scrutinize the financial history of "at least two dozen other suspects in intelligence services."

The founding director of FinCEN, Brian Bruh, told Kimery: "There's tons of crooks out there who are disguising their criminal profits. FinCEN needs to computerize as much as possible to be able to identify the really significant criminals and their activities."

But who decides what people are the "really significant criminals"? FinCEN has had great success tracking the financial business of drug traffickers, terrorists and spies. But crooks who looted the S&Ls and laundered their illegal gains have somehow eluded FinCEN's electronic reach. It remains unclear whether FinCEN has been used to track such politically connected "significant criminals."

And another question bears asking: Where was the national debate on whether the financial records of U.S. citizens should become the government's electronic property?

For his part, Kimery is withholding judgment. "From all the people I have personally met over there, they are doing an admirable job. If there is something really sinister going on, I haven't seen it," he says. "But that is not to say that the serious civil rights questions and privacy questions raised about what FinCEN is doing are not valid." ◀

In the next issue: more on FinCEN.

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



THE ENVIRONMENT

Acts of God?

*Why
“natural”
disasters are
increasingly
anything but
natural.*

By Theodore
Steinberg

The Deerfield Village Mobile Home Park in St. Charles, Mo., is near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, set on a low-lying piece of land. It is not a great place to be in a flood. Home to hundreds of working-class Missourians, who live there because it is the best housing they can afford, the park survived the 1973 and 1986 floods. In 1993, it was not so lucky.

Last summer the Mississippi surged over a nearby levee and turned Deerfield Village into an American version of Venice. The river had nowhere else to go, in part because Missouri has lost 87 percent of its wetlands thanks to government-sponsored levee-building and farming. Still, Bob Bodley, a county building inspector, said no one could have predicted or controlled the flood: “I don’t hold anybody responsible.”

And neither, for that matter, did most Americans, who overwhelmingly saw the Midwest floods of 1993 as something outside human control and responsibility. As the philosopher Stanley Cavell once observed, “We do not see our hand in what happens, so we call certain events melancholy accidents.” We also call them natural disasters.

Consider the following situation. It is 1992. Hurricane Andrew has just ripped through Florida and Louisiana, shattering the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and causing billions of dollars in damage. Who or what could possibly be responsible for such mayhem? The choices: (a) nature (b) man (c) the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (d) none of the above?

Enter President George Bush, who promptly circles choice “d.”

Fending off complaints about FEMA’s response to the disaster, Bush told reporters that he refused to “play the blame game.” In one respect, *Newsweek* reported, everyone could agree with the president: “Andrew was what the insurance companies call ‘an

act of God,’ a happening for which no mere human can be held to account.”

But if humankind played no role, then what were *Newsweek* readers to make of the story—carried in the very same issue—that singled out global warming for possibly increasing the intensity of storms, transforming relatively benign ones into killer hurricanes? Sure, the report noted, it was “impossible to blame any particular storm on global warming.” But was Andrew really a bona fide “act of God” if “man-made” global warming played a role in its amplification?

And was it really God who was responsible this spring when a tornado ripped through the Goshen United Methodist Church in Piedmont, Ala., killing 20 people? Not even the Rev. Kelly Clem, whose 4-year-old daughter was among the dead, blamed a higher power. As Clem pointed out to Vice President Al Gore, factors well within human control played an important role in the tragedy. Fewer lives would have been lost, Clem said, had the area had a more adequate storm warning system. But this part of Alabama is rural and, like much of rural America, painfully poor. It simply did not have the money to help pay for such a system.

Clearly, natural disasters are often far from natural. Writing in *Socialist Review* a decade ago, Jon Tinker compiled a set of interesting statistics. He discovered that between the ’60s and the ’80s, one could discern a 50 percent increase in the actual number of natural disasters worldwide. And yet the number of deaths per year attributed to natural disasters rose even more, from 23,000 in the ’60s to 143,000 in the ’70s, a sixfold increase.

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Volunteers in Parkville, Mo., make a futile attempt to hold back the surging Missouri River last summer.

Tinker concluded that two factors were making people more vulnerable to natural disasters. After looking at who suffers the most from these phenomena, he first observed that, not surprisingly, "they kill, overwhelmingly, poor people in poor countries." Consider the impact of the average Japanese disaster when compared with the average Peruvian one. According to Tinker's calculations, the average Japanese disaster killed just 63 people; the Peruvian disaster, a whopping 2,900. "Peru is not as prone to disaster as Japan, but it is 50 times more vulnerable. The reason is, basically, poverty," Tinker wrote. The poor, he explained, tend to occupy the most marginal land, property that is more susceptible to flooding and other natural hazards.

Because of technological interventions such as flood-control barriers and effective building codes, the world's industrialized nations are better protected against natural calamity than so-called undeveloped nations. Yet even such "advanced" countries, Tinker seemed to imply, might soon find themselves more at risk because of a second factor boosting the chances for natural calamity: human devastation of the environment. Many portions of the globe, for example, have become more vulnerable to flooding because of increasing deforestation and soil erosion. Without tree cover moderating the effect of heavy precipitation, low-lying areas are now more subject to rampaging floods (which happen, in modern times at least, more frequently than any other natural disaster). In Thailand, for example, nearly half

the country's entire land area had been allotted to logging concessions by 1988. In November of that year, heavy rains triggered unprecedented flooding in heavily deforested areas, killing hundreds of people.

Another factor tending to increase vulnerability is rising population density. The absence or ineffectiveness of zoning laws, especially in urban areas, has further increased the risk of "natural" calamity. Put simply, more people concentrated in, say, earthquake-prone metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles or San Francisco mean more potential disaster victims.

But if "man-made" problems such as population density, poverty and environmental mismanagement have made the world increasingly prone to the ravages of nature, why do we, as George Bush put it, refuse to play the blame game? And why—in an era when fewer and fewer Americans believe in divine intervention—do we continue to call natural disasters "acts of God"?

There was once a time, of course, when earthquakes, floods and storms were literally "acts of God." Back in the 17th and 18th centuries, for example, when people called something an act of God, they meant it—that God caused the disaster to occur, generally because of the wayward behavior of mortal men.

To the religiously inclined, God was the proximate cause of such disasters. But God alone was not solely responsible for them. Minister Thomas Foxcroft, writing in the aftermath of the 1727 earthquake that struck New England, saw the event as evidence of God's "divine power." Yet he also understood the quake as "a Token of Wrath kindled against a Place for the Wickedness of them that dwell therein." It was not God alone who acted here, but God in response to the errant acts of the churchgoers themselves. Natural disasters were morality tales that the God-fearing told themselves. If they behaved in a just and godly fashion, they believed, God would spare them and the earth.

Our present understanding of natural disaster is a long way from the understanding of the Rev. Foxcroft and his flock. Natural disasters have been robbed of any clear moral imperative—but at the same time have been interpreted in such a way as to negate human responsibility for their occurrence. They have become, if you will, *demoralized*.

This transformation occurred because of some important changes in Americans' relationship with nature. These changes began as early as the late 18th century and gained force in the two centuries thereafter. First, there was the attempt to order and control the natural world to a much greater degree than ever before. Consider, for example, what is surely one of the most remarkable schemes on record for ordering nature: the U.S. rectangular survey. Thomas Jefferson had the idea in the 1780s to divide the Western Territory into squares by imposing a grid system on it. Although the details of Jefferson's original plan were not implemented, the underlying spirit of rationalism and possessive individualism did find its way into the Ordinance of 1785.

The ordinance divided the West into neat little boxes so it could be sold and put to profitable use. More than a billion acres of land were carved up in such a fashion as the

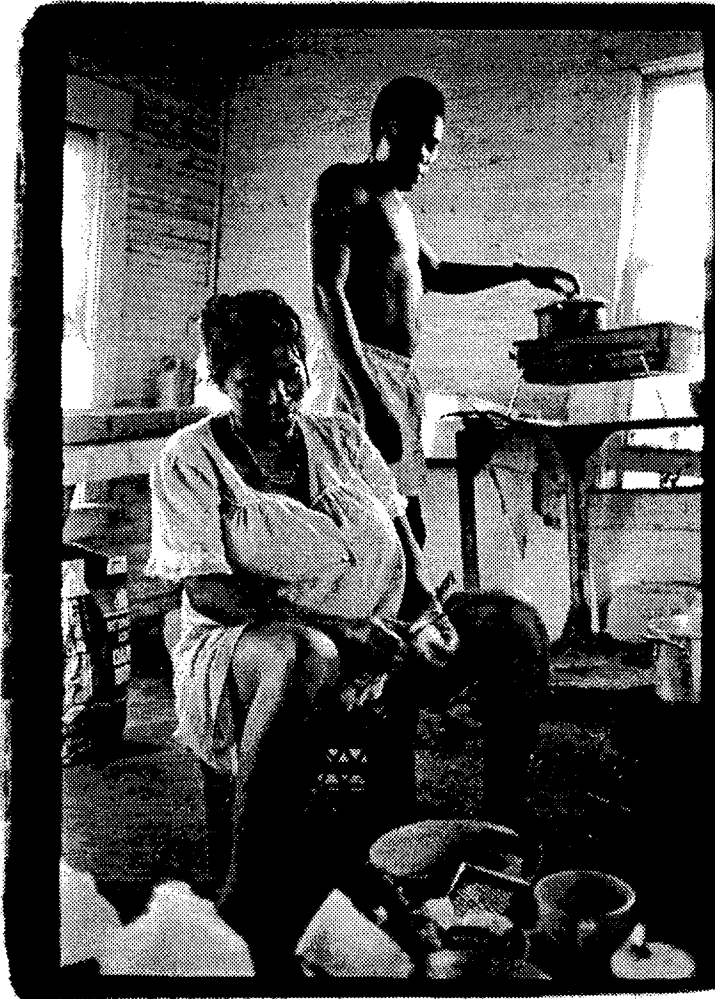
entire landscape was forced to yield before the compass and chain. In such a well-ordered landscape, the disorder posed by natural calamity was now seen as very threatening. After all, the entire point of the survey was to impose a geometrical logic on the land in order to make it more suitable for ownership, and thus more economically productive. To this end, the richness and diversity of the western landscape was subjugated to a rigid mathematical precision. Those who

supported the survey would scarcely welcome a disorderly flood or earthquake intruding on their tidy boxes of land, perhaps eliminating some of that land altogether.

While the American West was becoming a giant checkerboard, the industrial revolution had begun in the East. A great deal has been said and written about what the industrial transformation meant for workers, about the class conflict that took place under the factory roof, the changes in family life, leisure and politics. These were profound changes. But the emergence of the industrial age also marked an equally profound restructuring of Americans' stance toward the environment.

Nowhere was this shift more apparent than in the way that some Americans handled the abundant waters of the East. In New England, the heart of early industrial change, water was manipulated technologically with dams and power canals, controlled and sent in a thousand different directions in the name of production. Seeking to capitalize on nature's economic potential, early industrialists forced water to serve their needs for energy to power their mills. Thus while some Americans were imposing order on Western lands, others were busy measuring, controlling and ultimately exploiting water for the sake of greater production and profits.

Once a mystical, healing substance, water was now simply an instrumental good. No longer allowed to flow freely across the earth, it was instead measured according to the amount of work it could perform, the number of textile



Haitian immigrants victimized by Hurricane Andrew: natural disasters hit the poor harder than the rich.

CLINDA ROSIER/IMPACT VISUALS

spindles it could turn and, ultimately, the profit it could produce. And as this happened, floods and droughts started to take on new meaning as disruptive forces that interfered with the control of nature for profit.

There is no question that the attempt to order and control the natural world took a giant step forward in the 19th century. It did so again in the century that followed.

Now that the lands of the American West were ordered and sold, the task of living in that arid and inhospitable environment began in earnest. Whatever the ambitions of Eastern industrialists, their plans paled in comparison with the grandiose schemes for taming the West's wild waters. With the construction of Hoover Dam in 1935, the Bureau of Reclamation set out to mitigate dangerous floods and create enough water and electricity to make the desert more inhabitable.

Soon the bureau's fascination with dam-building became intense and virtually unstoppable. Hoover Dam and all the other dams that line the rivers of the West convey a simple message: we have won the war against nature.

Have we really? Historian Donald Worster has explored the consequences of the technological domination of water in the West. Those who have gained in the building of large-scale water control projects—agribusinessmen, urban entrepreneurs, the Bureau of Reclamation—have controlled water, yes. But they have also upset the ecological order by causing increasing siltation and salinity buildup. Build dams up and down a river, Worster explains, and eventually the river will rebel, ecological degradation will set in and the total control of nature will become that much more elusive. "Human domination over nature," he writes, "is quite simply an illusion, a passing dream by a naive species. It is an illusion that has cost us much, ensnared us in our own designs, given us a few boasts to make about our courage and genius, but all the same it is an illusion."

Yet the illusion lives on, despite the costs. LilliAnn Dittmer, once a farm woman and now a sociologist, noted the toll that last summer's floods took on farmers in Ursa, Ill. "This flood can remind them of how they lack power over nature, over government, themselves," she observed. "And so many of them can lash out at what they control, beating their families, their farm animals, too. I've seen it."

To a culture in love with the technological control of nature, natural disasters are a terribly dangerous thing. They betray the control of nature for the illusion that it is. They offend against order, particularly the economic order of capitalism. And because they expose human control of nature for the sleight of hand that it is, natural disasters are understood to be outside the domain of "normal" human interaction with the environment—which, in America at least, is mainly about making money.

Not just the control of nature, but the increasing com-



A Homestead, Fla., trailer park in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew.

modification of it, is behind our current understanding of natural disasters. This change also took on new force beginning in the 19th century. The land and its water, plants and animals were being drawn more and more into the world of markets and commodities. New England's plentiful waters became the abstraction of waterpower and were sold to industry. Michigan's pine trees became two-by-fours. Texas cows became steaks. And so on.

Historian William Cronon has explored the process of transforming nature into capital. That process, he notes, has obscured the social and ecological connections between Americans and the natural world. Nature has become an object, a fetishized commodity—so many ounces of meat, or bushels of grain, or feet of lumber. Thus people are rarely aware, for instance, of the destruction of nature necessary to produce the steak they are eating for dinner. In such a world, writes Cronon, eating is no longer "a moral act inextricably bound to killing."

More to the point, turning a tree into a two-by-four does not simply contribute to deforestation and soil erosion, thereby increasing the vulnerability to natural disaster. Lumbering also contributes to a shift in thinking about one's relationship to nature that has consequences for the way natural disasters are understood. For the tree is now a commodity—which, as Karl Marx realized long ago, is an odd and powerful thing. The commodity has the capacity to hide from view not just the labor that went into making it, but also the fact that nature was in a sense destroyed in its production.

It is easier to deny moral responsibility for what happens to nature when the ecological interdependencies bound up in a commodity are not immediately apparent. Moreover, if no one takes responsibility for the ecological consequences

of production when nature is obeying our commands and satisfying our need for energy, food and so forth, how likely is it that we will take responsibility when nature misbehaves and intrudes on the quest for economic production?

Natural disasters have thus been drained of their moral substance. To call Hurricane Hugo an "act of God," as *Time* did in 1989, does not evoke the moral urgency the term implied in the colonial period. It is, rather, to deny the social and ecological interdependency of life under capitalism. Once, the idea of invoking God in response to natural calamity was a strategy for eliciting moral responsibility. Now, calling out God's name amounts to an abdication of responsibility.

The geographer Kenneth Hewitt explains that today natural disasters are seen as discrete events cut off from the culture's everyday interactions with the environment. There is an "otherness" about such disasters, Hewitt observes, "that is most obvious in the recurrent use of words stressing the 'un'-ness of the problem." As he points out, natural disasters are unforeseen, unprecedented and unmanageable phenomena. They are "accidents." And most important, such a view of disasters situates them as "outside the realm of everyday responsibility both of society and individual."

We must change this view. To continue to understand natural disasters as morally neutral events is to shun responsibility for our actions toward nature and toward others, especially those of little means. Moreover, by disavowing moral responsibility for disaster, we are rationalizing the

kinds of economic oppression that explain why some people have Doppler radar systems in their area and others do not, why some people get adequate protection from floods and others cannot, why some live and some die.

Last summer the mighty Mississippi inundated Mark Twain's own Hannibal, Mo. It was the first big test for a new system of levees recently erected to protect Twain's boyhood home, as well as the rest of the city's historic downtown. That flood-control scheme cost \$8 million. And, to the relief of many, Twain's house came through the flood fine. This was not the case for the residents of the city's poorer sections, who, left without adequate flood protection, fled their homes because none of that money found its way into their neighborhoods. Left, figuratively speaking, high and dry, they were anything but when the flood was over. Said one woman who lived in the flooded poorer area: "They put in a flood wall to save Mark Twain's house and all the stuff about that dead man, so I don't know why they don't help the living." It is a question that Twain himself would have appreciated. ◀

Theodore Steinberg is writing a book entitled *Acts of God*. He is the author of *Slide Mountain, or the Folly of Owning Nature*, which the University of California Press will publish next year, and *Nature Incorporated* (Cambridge University Press), which was co-winner of the Willard Hurst Prize in Legal History. He teaches at the New Jersey Institute of Technology and Rutgers University, Newark.

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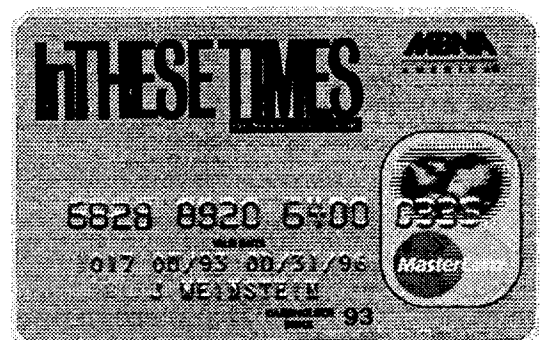
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COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Hope in the heartland

M

innesota's Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL), once a standard-bearer for progressive politics within the national Democratic Party, is being revitalized. Two groups formed in recent years—the Wellstone Alliance and the Minnesota Alliance for Progressive Action (MAPA)—are using old DFL strategies of grassroots organizing and coalition-building to pump political life back into the once-proud party.

Minnesota's DFL, as the name suggests, has from the start been a hybrid of electoral politics and progressive organizing. Labor, cooperative and reform organizers founded the Farmer-Labor Party in 1918; in 1944, the Farmer-Laborites merged with the Democratic Party. In national politics, Hubert Humphrey and his protégé Walter Mondale personified Minnesota's DFL.

In Minnesota, progressive forces are making a comeback.

By John Gardner
MINNEAPOLIS

Humphrey died in 1978. Conservative Republicans promptly won both Humphrey's and Mondale's Senate seats. Commentators buried the DFL, and Mondale's humiliating 1984 presidential loss seemed a deferred wake.

Mel Duncan, executive director of MAPA, watched the party's decline up close. A Twin Cities advocate for the developmentally disabled since 1972, he co-founded Jobs With Peace, a membership group that promoted conversion from military to civilian economics. Over the years, he looked on as the DFL lost to Republicans, while at the same time losing its progressive heritage and traditional constituencies.

In 1987, Minnesota state legislators killed virtually all progressive initiatives. Duncan wrote to organizers asking how their groups and constituencies could win so little. He argued that while progressive groups might never match the right's money, effective collaboration among such groups—from labor unions and environmentalists to civil rights and peace advocates—should be able to bring some success.

The first person to respond to Duncan's call was Paul Wellstone, a Carleton College political science professor, who arrived at Duncan's home at 7 a.m. on a Saturday, ready to strategize and run. Wellstone had campaigned unsuccessfully for state auditor in 1982, losing to current Republican Gov. Arne Carlson. Since 1984 he had represented the DFL on the Democratic National Committee. A longtime organizer in civil rights, welfare rights and rural movements, Wellstone appreciated Duncan's hopeful frustration. (See *ITT*, Aug. 23, 1993.)

Months of discussion led several progressive groups to found MAPA as a statewide coalition and permanent lobby for common concerns. Wellstone, along with others he helped inspire to political involvement—such as former Carleton student Ellen Anderson, now a state senator leading the fight against nuclear storage on the Mississippi River's Prairie Island—became key Alliance leaders.

MAPA gradually transformed Minnesota's fragmented progressive constituencies and organizations into a more effective movement. The coalition respected member organizations' separate constituencies and interests, but helped them find common ground. Groups worked together to identify legislative priorities, without subjecting each other to ideological litmus tests or purity contests. MAPA became a forum in which people could argue and vent among themselves, then move beyond doctrinal disagreements to effective common action. In legislative campaigns and personal relations, progressives learned to respect people who disagreed about specific issues or positions—something that had proven increasingly difficult for a fractured left.

**Sen. Paul Wellstone**

Working on issues in non-election years, MAPA has sought to influence DFL caucuses in elections. MAPA neither endorsed candidates nor worked on elections, but its network of leaders became increasingly active in DFL caucuses to hold legislators accountable.

With his history of effective organizing and the support of MAPA leaders, in 1990 Wellstone won the DFL endorsement to run against Rudy Boschwitz, one of the conservative Republicans elected in 1978. A moderate by Minnesota Republican standards, Boschwitz was a key supporter of President Reagan's regressive tax cuts and military buildup. Funded by major corporate interests, he had banked more than \$6 million in campaign funds before the DFL primaries even began. Wellstone and MAPA got their chance mainly because no DFL office-holder would risk challenging so secure an incumbent.

Wellstone ran an unusual campaign. With little money for television, he made his few ads count. One mimicked the offbeat labor film *Roger and Me*, in which the director chased the elusive GM president with a camera. Wellstone and crew tried cornering Boschwitz in his Senate office, making the most of the senator's refusal to debate. Wellstone could pay for only a few spots, but the image of Wellstone invading Boschwitz's empty office became an easily

quoted signature clip for news stories throughout the campaign. Other ads featured the candidate running triple-time to get everything in the 30 seconds he admitted was all he could afford.

This kind of cleverness got Wellstone a great deal of attention, and allowed him an opportunity to show voters his command of issues—especially with regard to health care. As polls showed Wellstone's support climbing unexpectedly, Boschwitz panicked. The Friday before the election, he sent a letter to Jewish supporters mentioning that Wellstone had married a gentile. In a state where intermarriage still means Norwegians eloping with Swedes, and where rural voters dislike political intrusions in family relations, the letter back-

fired. Boschwitz's basic mistake was not taking Wellstone's campaign, based on thousands of volunteers and a message about affordable health care, seriously. Boschwitz spent \$6 million losing to a novice who couldn't raise \$1 million.

In office, Wellstone quickly won national recognition, but not for health care. His position on the Gulf War managed to offend those on both sides of the issue. Wellstone outraged anti-war supporters by voting to send ground troops to Desert Shield—and then antagonized veterans and Israel supporters by opposing aerial bombings. MAPA progressives, still smarting from his vote for ground troops, would not defend him from attacks from the right.

Losing ground with Minnesota voters and bickering with his progressive supporters, Wellstone concluded in 1991 that he needed another alliance to cultivate his own political base. The result of this rethinking, the Wellstone Alliance, serves as a perpetual re-election campaign, a progressive caucus within the DFL and an ongoing public education program about issues. The current education campaign sponsors small house meetings about national health care—an issue dear to Wellstone, the Senate's primary sponsor of a bill calling for a Canadian-style government-administered health plan.

At one recent house meeting, Physicians for National Health Care President Theresa Zink, a Minneapolis family-

practice doctor and Alliance board member, spent hours discussing the intricacies of insurance reimbursement with nurse-anesthetists. The discussion was complex, even for the health care professionals participating. It was possible only because the small group met for several hours of discussion.

If house meetings about national health care are unusual re-election fare, so is everything else about the Wellstone Alliance. Rather than hoard money for a few weeks' worth of television saturation, the Alliance spends all the money it receives for education and local electoral campaigns. Individual donations are limited to \$100 per person per year, and no political action committee funds are accepted.

The Alliance's most important work is supporting progressive DFL-endorsed candidates. Efforts have paid off with some surprising successes—such as the 1992 election of David Minge, the first DFL congressman from the rural, conservative and habitually Republican 2nd Congressional District, and the 1993 election of Sharon Sayles-Belton, Minneapolis' African-American mayor. Even where the Alliance does not provide intensive staff help and logistical support (as it did for Minge or Sayles-Belton) a visit from the now-famous senator can raise several thousand dollars, generate local media coverage and inspire volunteers in the last weeks of a campaign—the kind of support that means winning close races.

The relationship between the alliances—Wellstone's and MAPA—is still being sorted out. Some progressives complain that Wellstone doesn't take strong enough stands on state and local issues. Right now, environmental groups are fighting the designation of Prairie Island in the Mississippi River as a long-term nuclear waste depository. Wellstone has not taken a public stand on the issue. He is not anxious to offend labor supporters with jobs at stake, and doubts how much clout he would have among state legislators. He has, however, brought federal Department of Energy representatives to offer plausible alternatives to Prairie Island—a contribution that even the disappointed environmentalists agree has been important.

Whatever the frustrations, Wellstone and Minnesota progressives have learned to weather this disagreement. "We've become more sophisticated about our different roles," says Duncan. "Grass-roots organizing has to preserve its autonomy from any elected official. And Paul can't be a grass-roots organizing effort. And there are a lot of issues besides those on which we disagree, on emphasis, degree or tactical stance."

Everyone acknowledges that both Wellstone and progressive organizations need their own independent vehicles, and that the relationship between electoral campaigns and progressive agendas has been productive. In places like Duluth, where labor, religious and other organizations are comparatively strong, organizers appreciate Wellstone's constant missionary zeal for democratic participation. "Sure, everyone's over-loaded," says Duluth AFSCME president and Alliance board member Alan Netland. "But Paul keeps reminding us that if we don't run for office, get out

the votes, get in office—and keep organizing every day—we're handing government over to the people who will keep doing to us what they've done for the last quarter-century and are still doing."

As the DFL leader, Wellstone is a local organizer's dream—someone who listens well and affirms the fundamental priority and importance of ongoing local action. It is not federal legislators, he tells everyone, who will create national health care or anything else—but pressure from the grass roots.

Local elections help to galvanize progressive agendas within the DFL. In grass-roots organizations like those that comprise MAPA, and in general races for town councils and county boards, people debate local, state and national issues. This kind of organizing recalls the way the DFL used elected representatives to promote local unions and cooperatives, and used local organizations to elect representatives. Places where progressives are weak and isolated, like David Minge's 2nd Congressional District, depend on the Alliance to offset the outside money that Republicans have been channeling with increasing effect. The alliances re-enfranchise the left.

All this may represent big change, but it doesn't feel new to Jean Burkhardt, a Wellstone Alliance board member who became country commissioner in traditionally Republican Martin County, in southwest Minnesotan corn and hog country, in 1992. "I remember as late as the '60s, when a thousand people would come to DFL meetings, or the Grange, or the Farm Bureau, to talk about politics in a way that really meant something to families and communities. Somehow we lost that. Maybe it was the mobility, or how much time it takes to run a household with both parents working, or television. But somehow we lost politics the way Paul's really bringing it back."

Wellstone's own re-election campaign will start after this year's congressional and gubernatorial races, but the Alliance is hard at work supporting single-payer position resolutions and getting ready to go into high election gear as soon as the DFL makes its endorsements in early June.

Conservative Republicans are eager for the 1996 return match. Paul Wellstone—the champion of Native Americans, racial minorities, gays, lesbians, unions and abortion—may become the mail-order right's favorite national target. Wellstone, who didn't back our boys in Desert Storm. Wellstone, who wants socialist bureaucracies to run your health care. With insurance companies standing to lose everything if Wellstone's single-payer plan succeeds, money will flood into the coffers of any Republican opponent.

If, on the other hand, Minnesota's progressive alliances can re-elect their senator in a race that is such a clear choice between money and the power of constant grass-roots organizing, they will demonstrate that people can take clear, strong, controversial stands—and win. ◀

John Gardner is the director of organizing for Leadership for Jobs, a project of Work for Wisconsin.

THE ECONOMY

Fed up with the Fed

B

ill Clinton was elected on the promise of jobs in a growing economy. But the most powerful government authority now charting the course of the American economy has decided that jobs and growth are not the nation's most important economic goals.

The unelected Federal Reserve Board, along with banker-selected representatives from the regional Fed banks, has decided instead that fighting inflation is the highest priority, even if that means stifling job creation. Yet since inflation is now low and shows no sign of accelerating, the Fed, basing its actions on questionable economic indices, is actually jousting with the specter of future inflation.

The initial effect of this policy—a series of four interest-rate hikes that began in February and continued into mid-May—was financial instability. Stock and bond markets dropped sharply; big speculators took financial hits; long-term interest rates rose

(even though in theory they should have declined as “the market” was reassured that future inflation would be controlled); and the dollar fell further in value (even though higher interest rates should have made the dollar seem more attractive).

Just as there were signs of hope that the anemic recovery might begin to yield some jobs, the Fed's moves created new investor fears about the future. Perhaps investors were worried about real-world inflation that nobody could see yet, but they may simply have been reacting to a manufactured uncertainty about how much higher the Fed would ratchet interest rates. The Fed tried to reassure the financial markets that it had achieved the “neutrality” it wanted, implying that interest rates would remain stable for a while, but inflation hawks were still calling for higher rates.

Rising interest rates will eventually slow economic growth. Businesses most sensitive to interest rates, like housing, may suffer hardship soon, but many big corporations (and homeowners who refinanced their mortgages) will not feel the pinch right away. Thus the Fed will have to intensify its efforts to dampen growth. Yet since the Fed's power has diminished in a new financial economy that is less dependent on banks to provide credit, recent history suggests the central bank will probably keep tightening the noose until it precipitates a “credit crunch” or some type of financial crisis.

When the economy once again begins to contract and people see little progress in creating good jobs or raising their wages, they will not be calling for the head of Fed chairman Alan Greenspan. They will be voting against Bill Clinton and the Democrats (just as they voted against George Bush, supposedly Greenspan's friend).

Yet at this point Clinton is riding down policy creek without a paddle of his own to steer the economic canoe. In his first year in office, he abandoned his modest plans for a fiscal stimulus and was trapped into a long-range budget-reduction program that gives the administration extremely little flexibility. Clinton essentially struck a “Faustian bargain,” in economist Paul Davidson's words, with Greenspan and the Fed: we'll help slow inflation by cutting the budget; you keep interest rates low. It wasn't ideal, but it produced modest annual growth of around 3 percent (less than the average recovery) with low inflation (less than a 3 percent increase last year in the Consumer Price Index).

Yet the Fed broke the implicit bargain. “It was a tremendous breach of faith, especially with Congress,” argues James Galbraith of the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas. “If I were a member of Congress, I'd say, ‘Why did I vote for those deficit reductions?’” Davidson says. He speculates that Greenspan may have seen the earthquake aid for California—for which there were no off-

The powerful Federal Reserve Board is destroying the prospects for widespread job creation.

By David Moberg

setting cuts—as a congressional breach of the deal. Even so, the deficit is still falling rapidly—from \$223 billion for this fiscal year to an estimated \$166 billion in fiscal year 1996—and thus acting as a drag on the economy. Nonetheless, the administration must go along with Greenspan, Economic Policy Institute (EPI) president Jeff Faux explains, “because they’ve given him all the cards.”

There is widespread agreement that inflation is not now a problem, but mainstream economists believe there is a “natural” rate of unemployment; if too many people get jobs, then workers will be able to demand higher wages and inflation will take off. Yet the historical record suggests that there is no such natural rate. Faux argues that “there is no case, going back to 1913, when the Consumer Price Index rose above 5 percent inflation for reasons other than war and oil shocks. The fear of peacetime recoveries producing inflation that grows faster than the economy can handle is just not true.”

Moreover, the policy tools that the Fed is using are unreliable. Even the Fed concedes, for example, that the Consumer Price Index probably overstates real inflation. And it’s not even clear what guidelines the Fed should use in setting monetary policy. From 1979 until last year, the Fed tried to fine-tune the nation’s money supply as a means of regulating the economy. But it could never properly gauge how much money was being created.

So last year, Greenspan began setting anticipated “real,” or inflation-adjusted, interest rates as its target. But when Randall Wray and Dimitri Papdimitriou of the Jerome Levy Economics Institute at Bard College analyzed how well the Federal Reserve would have performed in the past if it had used this new guideline, they found that Greenspan’s policy would have been wrong about three-fourths of the time.

There are many reasons why inflation is not much of a threat now: unions are weak; international competition is keen; there are vast new low-wage labor markets in the old communist bloc; oil prices are low; manufacturing productivity has been rising. “There’s nothing other than the purely unsupported speculation of a group of white folks sitting around a table in Washington for any worry about inflation,” Galbraith says. “This is all sophistry.”

The United States obviously needs continued strong growth to reduce unemployment and underemployment. Many people have been forced into part-time jobs, unsatisfactory self-employment, early retirement or low-wage jobs in recent years. Although the official unemployment rate is 6.4 percent, 15 percent of the labor force is looking for work, if the underemployed and discouraged workers are included. That alone suggests there is far more slack in the economy than Greenspan calculates.

Furthermore, the Clinton administration’s job-training and education strategies won’t work unless there is a strong job market. Likewise, if Clinton and Congress force welfare recipients off the rolls and into jobs, there needs to be a robust economy. Many welfare recipients will be employers’ last choice and will find work only in a boom.

Less obviously, the country needs strong growth to raise wages, even though that is precisely what terrifies the inflation hawks. About one-fifth of full-time workers last year earned poverty-level wages in 1992, an increase by half since 1979. For two decades real earnings have essentially stagnated for most workers, while the share of national income going to workers has declined and inequality has soared. Higher growth will boost productivity, especially at first, Galbraith argues. That would permit non-inflationary wage increases. As EPI economist Dean Baker argues, “If you want wages to rise, you can’t accept that 6 percent is full employment.”

Yet Clinton, having lost control of fiscal policy, now has few options. He can steer credit to where it will do the most good, as the administration is trying to do on a small scale with its community development banking legislation and its reforms of the Community Reinvestment Act regulations on bank community lending. (See *In These Times*, June 28, 1993 and Feb. 7, 1994.) He could also support legislation to drop regional bankers from the Federal Reserve’s important Open Market Committee or make regional Fed representatives presidential appointees. This, like his first two appointments to the Board of Governors, could slightly democratize the banker-dominated institution and trim the inflation hawks’ tailfeathers. Likewise he could support more openness in Federal Reserve decision-making. One excellent reform would be to allow a C-SPAN camera in the room when interest rates are debated. If we can watch our elected representatives deliberate over our economic future, why can’t we witness the debates of the powerful but unelected Fed?

But ultimately, as Minsky argues, changing the Fed structure without changing its function will accomplish little. There is no reason why national economic policy should be dominated by one goal, fighting inflation. In any case, Minsky and others point out, the Federal Reserve should focus on keeping interest rates low and preserving financial stability, leaving government budgetary policy as the main tool to fight inflation. If the public is going to hold presidents—and Congress—responsible for the fate of the economy, then the power of the Federal Reserve must be reined in and its policies made more compatible with the public’s goal of more and better jobs. ▴

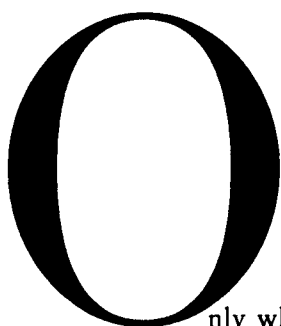
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WESTERN EUROPE

Illiberal education



Only when the unthinkable happens does it become thinkable. And even then, one can choose not to think about it. Europe has chosen not to think about its present crisis, despite the fact that events truly unthinkable a year or two ago are reality today.

*The right
is rising
again.
Does anyone
care?*

By Paul Hockenos

In Eastern as well as in Western Europe, far-right nationalist—even neo-fascist—movements have made stunning gains within the last six months alone. In Italy, Austria, Russia and the Ukraine, those triumphs have been at the ballot box. In the Balkans, they have been on the ground, whether in the mountains of Bosnia or on the streets of Thessaloniki and Athens.

Many in Western Europe regarded the upsurge of ethnic violence and rekindled fascism in Eastern Europe as a problem of the “other Europe,” as a bug that the

young democracies would perhaps work out in time. Never for a moment did policy-makers see the problems in Eastern Europe as their own. It was foolish to think that the West could somehow cordon itself off from developments in Eastern Europe. Another illusion was to think that the West itself is somehow immune to the spirits of its own not-so-distant past. Suppressed rather than constructively addressed, illiberal nationalism and outright fascism still have roots deep within Fortress Europe. Amid social uncertainty and political stagnation, the far right is blossoming again.

In the mid-'80s, an electorally viable New Right movement emerged throughout Western Europe. The National Front in France, the Republican Party in Germany and the Freedom Party in Austria took anywhere from 5 to 25 percent of the vote in state and federal elections. With a revamped, modern image, they steered a course between old-school fascism and traditional conservatism. Their streamlined jargon, however, barely concealed the familiar trademarks of their

infamous predecessors—racism, anti-Semitism and authoritarian visions of state and society.

By the '90s, these parties and their counterparts in Italy, Spain, Sweden, Belgium and Switzerland had established themselves as part of the political landscape. Although most of the New Right parties have no chance of coming directly to power, they inevitably influence political discourse, forcing centrist and conservative parties to respond or to adopt their rhetoric.

With few exceptions, the European establishment has kept nervously quiet about the resurgence of the right in Western Europe. One certainly would have thought that the recent victory of a right-wing/neo-fascist coalition in Italy would have provoked protests and condemnations from the entire European Union (EU), an institution supposedly based upon the principles of liberal democracy. For the first time in postwar history, a neo-fascist party will share power in a democratic state. The most radical of Italy's three coalition partners, the National Alliance, openly heralds itself as the “post-fascist” successor to Benito Mussolini, the father of European fascism. In its program, the party demands that portions of the Adriatic coast (which now belong to Croatia and Slovenia) be “returned to Italy.”

Italy is only the most dramatic example of the extreme right's recent advances. In Austria's statewide elections in March, the xenophobic, anti-Europe Freedom Party, under yuppie leader Jörg Haider, captured more than 30 percent of the vote in three states, its strongest showing so far.

Though less visible than their counterparts in countries with fascist pasts, ultra-right movements are growing in the traditionally liberal Netherlands and Scandinavia.

Like the far-right parties in Germany and Belgium, with whom they cultivate close contacts, these groups combine economic populism with racist demagoguery against foreigners, refugees and the idea of a multicultural Europe. In early May elections in the Netherlands, the largest of the far-right parties, the Center Democrats (CD), tripled its previous showing. Though still insignificant, with under 3 percent of the national vote, the CD established local strongholds in some districts of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The "foreigner problem" was campaign theme No. 1.

The one country in which the right could fare worse this year is Germany. Since 1987, the Republicans, under former SS-man Franz Schönhuber, have regularly broken the 5 percent hurdle to make their way into state legislatures, sometimes garnering as much as 11 percent of the vote with slogans like "Germany for the Germans!" In local elections earlier this year in Lower Saxony (former West Germany), however, the party narrowly failed to breach the required minimum. Whether the Republicans will make it into the federal parliament in the fall remains an open question.

As worrying as the right's breakthroughs are, the radical nationalisms and chauvinisms that extremist parties feed upon in most of Western Europe are still restricted to a minority of the population. In Greece, however, a NATO and EU member, voters and politicians alike have virulently opposed Macedonian statehood, inflaming Greek nationalism and adding an additional element of instability to a region with no shortage of disaster scenarios.

The "socialist" government in Athens, which ironically holds the EU presidency at the moment, has stopped at nothing to whip up ill will against Macedonia, as well as traditional enemies Albania and Turkey. In March, more than 1 million Greeks demonstrated in Thessaloniki against international recognition of the former Yugoslav republic under the name "Macedonia," which the Greeks, for historical reasons, claim as their own. Just as the international community appeared to be making progress in Bosnia, Greece announced an economic blockade of tiny, landlocked Macedonia, a move that spurred its fellow EU members to take it before the European Court.



The return of ethnic nationalism and the march of the right in Western Europe is dangerous for obvious reasons. But perhaps not so obvious, the new trend implicitly undermines the structures and institutions that underpin democracy in Western Europe and, hypothetically, embody minimum standards of conduct for the new democracies in Eastern Europe. The Eastern Europeans' entrance into the Western European Union, the Council of Europe or eventually the EU will be tied to their adherence to an accepted democratic consensus, based upon the rule of law, political pluralism, respect for minority rights and the inviolability of international borders. If the EU member-states themselves fail to live up to these standards, they become meaningless in a larger context.

The inability of Europe to halt Serb aggression in the former Yugoslavia has already severely damaged the credibility of these values and the mechanisms available for enforcing them. Every victory for the far right is another blow to the fragile consensus that holds post-Cold War Europe together.

Paul Hockenos is the author of *Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Postcommunist Eastern Europe* (Routledge).

Whittle or nothing?

By Alex Molnar

Like a monster in a grade-B horror movie that keeps rising from the dead, Channel One is back again, haunting the legislative corridors and cloakrooms of the New York state capitol in Albany. Channel One, the brainchild of the mad scientist of captive-audience advertising, Chris Whittle, is frantically trying to pry open the potentially vast New York market.

Channel One, of course, is the controversial 12-minute "news" program—including two minutes of commercials—broadcast to captive audiences of students in sixth through twelfth grade. Schools that sign on with Whittle get the use of television monitors and access to Channel One programming—but they must guarantee that their students will be subjected to the broadcast.

So far, New York is the only state to declare an outright ban on commercials in electronic instructional programming, and opponents of Channel One fear that Whittle's lobbyists are priming legislators to overturn that ban within the next month. But there is more at stake in Albany than whether or not Channel One gains access to the New York market. Chris Whittle is waging a desperate struggle for his corporate survival. Despite his reputation as an entrepre-

neurial whiz kid, Whittle is in deep financial trouble.

In the 1993 fiscal year, Whittle Communications lost about \$20 million and is facing another revenue shortfall this year. Of all Whittle's ventures, Channel One has been his only financial winner. And Channel One has reached an earnings plateau. Though the Whittle network boasts of distribution in 48 states, it is adding few schools to those already under contract, and a number of advertisers are reconsidering their commitment to a project they consider overpriced. All of this makes New York critical to Whittle's future.

New York is Channel One's biggest potential growth market. If Channel One doesn't get into the state, Whittle may not have the cash flow to float his other ventures. However, the New

The mad scientist of in-school advertising is playing a desperate end game in New York.

York Board of Regents has twice driven a stake through its heart. In February 1990, despite intense lobbying by Whittle (who had the editorial support of the *New York Times*), the regents adopted a regulation that banned public schools from entering into any contract that compelled students to view televised commercials. Accepting New York Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol's argument—"We must provide safe havens for children free of commercial taint"—the regents reaffirmed their ban last June.

Anticipating that his creation would die at the hands of the regents, Whittle had already devised a legislative strategy to resuscitate it. On Feb. 16, 1993, the chair of the New York State Assembly Education Committee, Angelo Del Toro, introduced Assembly Bill 3688-A. An identical bill (S.B. 3671-A) was introduced in the Senate by Education Committee chair Charles D. Cook on March 17, 1993. The Del Toro-Cook bills have nothing to do with educational concerns. They are about advertising dollars and the political influence those dollars can buy. This striking example of special interest legislation would overrule the regents' ban and grant local school boards the authority to decide whether or not to allow "supplementary electronic instructional materials containing commercial advertising" in their schools. If the Del Toro-Cook bills become law, the only supplementary electronic instructional materials *not* subject to regents approval would be those that contained advertising.

In 1993, the Del Toro-Cook bills died in committee. But in New York, bills not voted on in the first year of a two-year legislative session are not finally dead until the end of the legislative session of the second year. This means that both bills may yet be brought to a vote. Exactly when that might be is impossible to know because of the legislative logjam created by the legislature's continuing fail-

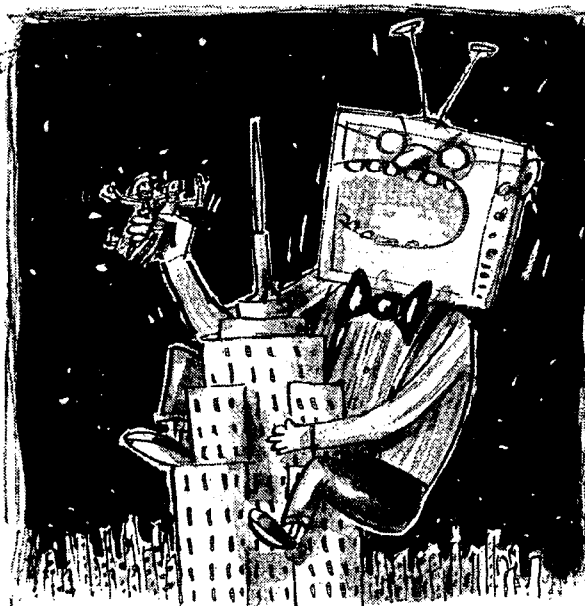
ure to agree on a budget bill. As *In These Times* went to press, some observers were estimating that the showdown on Channel One would come in late May or early June.

Whittle is willing to spend big money to keep his monster alive. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that he spent more than \$1 million lobbying the California legislature in the early '90s to defeat legislation that would have banned Channel One. During that fight, Whittle retained lobbyists with connections on both sides of the aisle. To press the case for Channel One, he hired both Steven A. Merksamer, a chief of staff to former California Republican Gov. George Deukmejian, and Bobbie Metzger, a former aide to California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown and one of Sacramento's most effective political consultants. State Sen. Art Torres told the *Los Angeles Times* that he had never seen "this magnitude of lobbying on an education issue."

Whittle seems determined to repeat his winning formula in New York. Whittle has hired the New York law firm of Bower & Gardner to plead his case with the legislature. Bower & Gardner is one of the largest and most powerful lobbying operations in the state. One of their senior partners is none other than Stanley Fink, the longtime Democratic speaker of the assembly who retired after the 1990 legislative session.

According to J. Robert Daggett, executive assistant to New York Commissioner of Education Sobol, the two people doing most of the arm-twisting in Albany are Kenneth Shapiro, former chief counsel to Fink when he was speaker, and Peter Piscitelli, a longtime lobbyist who formerly represented the City of New York and the New York School Board, among other clients. Each of these men is well connected to both Republicans and Democrats, and each is considered among the most effective and influential lobbyists in Albany. It will be impossible to say

with certainty how much money Whittle is throwing into his lobbying campaign until the final figures are reported at the end of the year. However, according to Daggett, it was necessary for Whittle to plunk down a \$75,000 retainer just to start the Bower &



Gardner meter running.

For Whittle, that may be money well spent. Unless he can regain momentum by cracking the New York market, his battered "educational" empire could collapse. Over the past two years, according to the Associated Press, Whittle has laid off 250 workers and has "restructured" to focus on three core businesses: Channel One, the Medical News Network and the Edison Project. The Medical News Network is an interactive television service for doctors to be sponsored by drug companies. For the past two years, Whittle has run the network as a pilot project. Although he claims the network will begin full-scale operation in October, Whittle is struggling to find sponsors and investment capital. As it now stands, the Medical News Network could further drain Whittle's financial resources.

The Edison Project, touted in 1991 as a bold plan to build a nationwide chain of 200 for-profit schools by 1996, is now reduced to scrambling for a few contracts to manage existing public schools. Despite being awarded

contracts to run schools in three districts in Massachusetts, the bulb is dimming daily for the privateers at Edison. After three years of trying, Whittle has been unable to attract a single outside investor to put money into Edison. Since 1991, its only source of power has been the \$60 million kicked in by Whittle and his three original partners, Time Warner, Associated Newspaper Holdings and Philips Electronics. Associated and Philips have refused to put in additional funds. Time Warner backed out of the Edison Project in 1993 and is reportedly looking to sell its stake in Whittle Communications, which it considers a money-losing proposition.

Unless he can increase revenues from Channel One, Whittle is unlikely to have the money to sustain the Edison Project or to have much hope of convincing investors that it is worth the risk.

For those opposed to privatization in education, the place to be right now is arm in arm with the opponents of Channel One in Albany. It is there that a decisive battle, which may determine the future of the Edison Project, is being fought.

Anyone interested in expressing an opinion on New York's Whittle bills can write to the Hon. Charles D. Cook, State Senator, Legislative Office Building, Albany, NY 12247, or to the Hon. Angelo Del Toro, Member of the Assembly, Legislative Office Building, Albany, NY 12248. For more information about national opposition to Channel One, contact UNPLUG, a national youth organization working for commercial-free, equal education. Write UNPLUG, 360 Grand Ave., #385, Oakland, CA 94610 or call 510-268-1100.

Alex Molnar is a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His book, *Giving Kids the Business: The Commercialization of American School Reform*, will be published by Westview Press in 1995.

VIEWPOINT

Slouching toward intervention in Chiapas

By Rick Rockwell

Is it possible to stop President Bill Clinton before he adds Mexico to his list of foreign policy disasters? Marching into traps set by George Bush, the president has looked like an affable goof on foreign affairs. But Clinton is about to edge close to Mexico's simmering guerrilla uprising in Chiapas. Any misstep there will be a tragedy of his own making.

Anyone who thought that the U.S. appetite for meddling in Latin American guerrilla wars ended with the '80s should think again. And the temptation to dictate policy to our neighbor to the south isn't confined to the president. As usual, Congress wants a taste, too.

Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ) has led the way by chairing hearings on Mexico's Zapatista revolt. Fresh from his successful battle to tighten the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, Torricelli has turned his sights on Mexico. This time, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will be the economic weapon that Torricelli plans to brandish at the Mexicans to force them to see it the American way.

"The approval of NAFTA was not an end in itself," Torricelli said before the hearings began. "We must use this document to promote democratic and human rights reforms in Mexico."

Ironically, Torricelli voted against

NAFTA. But the economic pact now serves as a way for him and his colleagues on the House Foreign Affairs Committee to gain political leverage in Mexico. This has a familiar feeling. It seems eerily close to the way the United States played politics in Central America under the guise of human rights reforms in the past.

But why has it taken Torricelli and company so long to get interested in human rights abuses in Mexico? The Mexican Army shot unarmed Tzeltal Indians in Chiapas in 1980 and the United States didn't hold hearings. For two years before the Zapatista revolt, human rights abuses in Chiapas topped the list compiled by Mexico's Center for Human Rights—and the U.S. Congress stayed silent.

Could the congressional concern stem from the fact that in the age of NAFTA, U.S. prestige and potential investment in Mexico might be threatened by instability?

While Congress has made noise about Mexico's woes, the Clinton administration has responded with cues taken from another Latin American veteran, Teddy Roosevelt, who counseled soft words and carried a big stick. And so the current administration has combined a cautious silence with military preparations.

Torricelli's committee had to insist to get an explanation of the administration's stance on the

revolt, more than a month after it erupted. During the hearings, Undersecretary for Latin American Affairs Alexander F. Watson testified, "The legitimate grievances of the people of southern Mexico were neither caused by NAFTA nor should NAFTA be in any way compromised by these developments."

Meanwhile, the United States moved 4,500 troops and several helicopters to Guatemala in January. The Pentagon claimed that the troops were sent to help with infrastructure projects. But this deployment could also be seen as a way of getting U.S. forces just across the border from Chiapas in a position to supply and support the Mexican army. Infrastructure projects were the excuse for sending thousands of U.S. troops to Honduras during the contra war in neighboring Nicaragua. Not surprisingly, those troops ended up aiding the contras.

Could it happen again? Certainly. If we consider the opinions of some members of the Clinton administration, this military deployment seems somewhat explicable. U.S. Ambassador to Mexico James R. Jones, for example, believes the Zapatistas are at least partially supplied by Cuba and that one of the commanders of the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) is Cuban.

What is the government's policy? Congress rails about human rights abuses while the administration provides discreet diplomatic and military support. This muddled approach demonstrates the persistence of U.S. imperial strategies toward Latin American affairs—and how poorly Washington's foreign policy wonks understand the origins of the uprising in Chiapas.

Watson and the State Department downplay Jones' theories and acknowledge that poverty is at the root of the Zapatista revolt. But somehow they don't understand the

threat NAFTA poses to the subsistence farmers of Chiapas.

Crammed into some of the most crowded, backward communal farms in Mexico, peasant farmers in Chiapas must compete for agricultural resources with some of the most powerful and wealthy cattle barons and corporate farmers in their country. Four years ago, they watched in despair as a worldwide slump in coffee prices hit their local economy hard. Recent moves by the Mexican government to allow large landowners to take over communal farms and to restrict the timber industry have hurt employment and made people fearful that they will lose their land.

This is a region where a quarter of the population is permanently unemployed, and the government admits that 60 percent of the people who can find work are paid below the minimum wage of ten nuevopesos a day (or \$3.33). As a result of NAFTA, U.S. corn prices may undercut the already paltry earnings from that crucial crop in Chiapas.

Rebel spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos calls NAFTA a "death sentence for indigenous people." Is the State Department listening? The problems in Chiapas go beyond poverty and relate directly to the politics that keeps poverty in place. The rhetoric of the Zapatistas, which is neither Leninist nor Maoist, echoes their namesake, Mexican revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata. The Zapatistas call for "peace, bread, work, land, democracy and justice." Subcomandante Marcos adds: "We are not talking about communism vs. capitalism. We are talking about life or death."

Does the Clinton administration remember the last time the United States intervened in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution and was roundly condemned by all the factions fighting at the time? Mexicans flinch every time the United States storms into Latin America. They haven't forgotten that the southwestern United States was once northern Mexico.

Although U.S. congressional hear-

ings on Chiapas pose only a limited threat to Mexico's sovereignty, the Mexican government has characterized them as unfriendly. Certainly, they can't be seen as a sincere attempt at fostering a better atmosphere for human rights, considering the integral role official repression has played in the governing of Chiapas.

If Torricelli wants to be sensitive to Mexico's vulnerable position in this year of internal upheaval, maybe he should defer to the inquiries of various international human rights organizations and officially move to sanction their recommendations.

The congressman, the president and the administration should remember how misunderstandings start. They start when people fail to listen. Before the United States edges closer to dealing directly with Chiapas, American leaders should listen to what the Zapatistas and the Mexicans are saying. ▴

Rick Rockwell is a graduate student at the University of Southern California.

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I N T H E A R T S

Points of departure

P.O.V. is a challenging antidote to commercial TV's sleazy "reality" programming.

By Pat Aufderheide

Into television's annual summer doldrums strides, once again, the energetic little public television series *P.O.V.* The 10-part event, beginning June 7 and running until August 9 (check your local listings), regularly wakes up the medium with point-of-view documentaries.

The genre known as "reality" programming—cheap, shocking and as audience-attracting as a car accident—has carved out a lucrative spot for itself on the TV schedule. But whether it's the gore and grunge of *Cops* or the silliness of *America's Funniest Home Videos*, reality programming usually means serving up the embarrassments, weaknesses and tragedies of private citizens as the stuff of entertainment. It's humiliation as information.

P.O.V. (which stands, of course, for point of view)

has become the place where subjectivity begins in reality programming. Veteran viewers may recall last year's celebrated opener, *Silverlake Life*, the diary of a couple dying of AIDS, and the explosively controversial video diary of a black gay man, *Tongues Untied*, in 1991. *P.O.V.* has developed into a fertile home for essay documentaries—films that don't necessarily deal directly with social issues but that convey the felt experience of people whose lives testify in some way to the conflicts shaping society.

This year's season opens with *Time Indefinite* (June 7), a feature-length personal journal video by Ross McElwee. The movie has already been a minor theatrical hit, as was McElwee's earlier *Sherman's March*. McElwee cultivates an on-air personality of indecisive nebbishness; he's unable to commit to life, wanting to document rather than dive in. He takes the viewer along with him in self-indulgent but revealing meanderings among his friends and family, uncovering the daily search for meaning that every seemingly ordinary person must undertake.

In *Time Indefinite*, just as this act is beginning to wear thin, and as his young man's tentativeness is beginning to look too much like the fussy querulousness of age, McElwee declares to his family (on camera, of course) that he's marrying. As marriage and impending parenthood seem about to plunge the happy couple into anonymous banality (they helplessly flail in the clutches of a baby crib saleswoman who firmly tells them all the little blankets have ruffles), McElwee is jarred—by his wife's miscarriage and his father's death—back into questions of the meaning of life.

What was whimsical in *Sherman's March* has now become the agony of a man who, scared and lonely, is suddenly aware that he himself is mortal. With his wife's new pregnancy and the arrival of son Adrian, McElwee discovers that he's less and less eager to film his own life, and more eager to live it. While culturally specific to the point of narcissism, *Time Indefinite* has to resonate with everyone circling uneasily around that crossroads age of 40.

The intensely personal *Time Indefinite* might be seen as an almost pointed statement to and about *P.O.V.*'s most loyal audience—middle-class, aging, white baby boomers, who as a group have a well-known fascination with themselves. And for those who believe narcissism is a defining feature of the boomer era, there is *Hearts of Darkness* (July 26), the making-of-*Apocalypse Now* documentary. (See *In These Times*, Jan. 29, 1992.) This film allows boomers to simultaneously wax nostalgic and experience "the horror" as Coppola conflates world history, his movie and himself.

Several first-person films in the series expand the social range of voices, while also demonstrating the power of the first-person mode to evoke the human meaning of social

conflict. In *Memories of Tata* (June 28), for instance, young Nicaraguan-American filmmaker Sheldon Schiffer creates an uneasy meditation on his sometimes loving, sometimes violent immigrant grandfather.

Perhaps the most astonishing of the first-person films is *Dialogues with Madwomen* (August 2). Directed by Allie Light (who won an Oscar for her 1991 documentary *In the Shadow of the Stars*), the film features the life stories of seven women—including the director—who have suffered some form of mental illness. As they speak, we see brief reenactments and dramatizations of their narratives. This visual poetry informs the vision of the women, several of whom are artists and each of whom is a captivating storyteller. Light's style makes the film a piece of art as much as it is a social exploration.

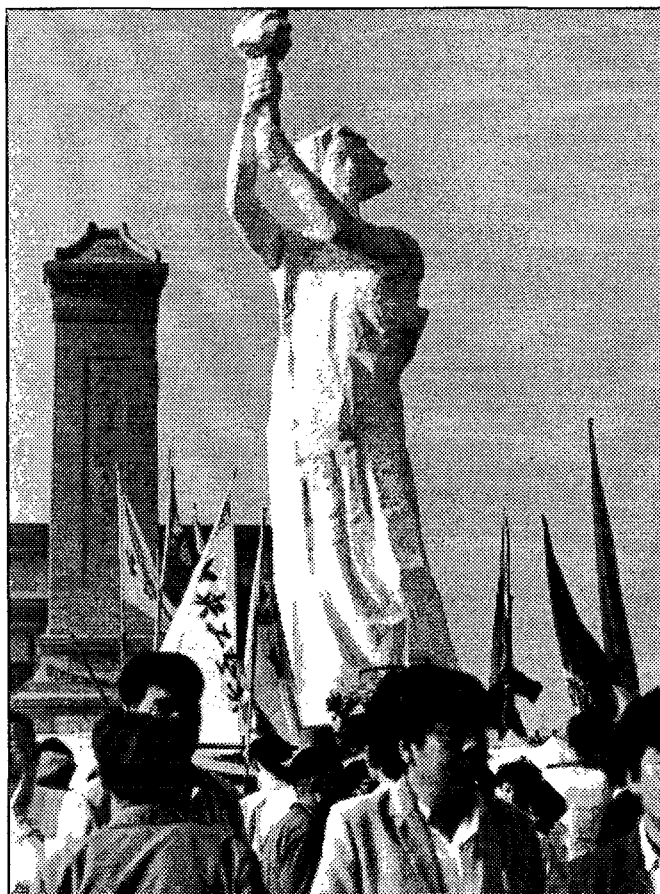
The stories make the case that these women have not been simply mad but driven mad—by abusive parents, racist behavior, intolerably limiting gender roles and therapy itself. But *Dialogues* also has the wry edge of the director's perception. Light recalls one time during her own institutionalization for depression when an inmate came running down the hall with a phone receiver ripped from the wall yelling, "The president has been shot!"

"Pay no attention, he's hallucinating," said her ever-wise doctor, unaware that JFK had just been assassinated.

Other films in the series explicitly address an issue of social or political justice. Perhaps the most emotionally dramatic is *The Heart of the Matter* (July 12). Social activists Gini Reticker and Amber Hollibaugh effectively employ a "meet the victims" approach to the subject of women with AIDS. The film focuses on the last year of Janice Jirau, a black woman already widowed by AIDS whose family rallies around her, and who wants her dying to help raise women's awareness of the disease. The stories of four other women are intercut, revealing the ignorance that promotes the disease among women.

Escape from China (June 21), examining the three-year struggle of a Tiananmen protester to elude Chinese authorities, comes with its own drama. In order to retrace Zhang Boli's escape to the United States, Chinese filmmaker Iris Kung (a pseudonym) had to resort at times to filming from behind bushes and had to smuggle her footage out of China. Zhang emerges, brash and stubborn, as a complete personality who wins personal freedom at the cost of a wife and child left behind.

Other advocacy films assemble arguments in ways that echo the predictability of televisual magazine journalism. *The End of the Nightstick* (July 5) looks like an attempt at a local, 20/20-type video magazine story. Chicago police are notorious for their brutal treatment of suspects, especially African-American suspects; the details of this brutality came out in the trial of one particularly vicious official, Jon Burge. (See *In These Times*, March 8, 1993 and April 4, 1994.) *One Nation under God* (June 14) takes aim at evangelical organizations attempting to "cure" homosexuality, focusing on the founders of one such organization, who have since



Escape from China, directed by Iris Kung.

quit and become lovers. And *Passin' It On* sympathetically chronicles the life story of Dhoruba Bin Wahad, a Black Panther whose conviction for killing a police officer was overturned after he had served 19 years in prison.

Humor is always in short supply in social-issue documentaries, but the caper of the series, *The Times of a Sign* (August 9), fuels its moral tale with the stuff. This is the Iran-contra scandal as seen from the vantage point of Odon, Ind., John Poindexter's hometown—which was so proud of its local hero it named a street after him. The town was also home to a bunch of guitar-strumming hippies. One of them, Bill Breeden, stole the sign for Poindexter Street—and thus put himself in a position to be the only person in the scandal to actually serve time in prison. When you're done laughing, you're still thinking about it.

P.O.V. documentaries at their best make you think both about social issues and about our ways of addressing them. Now, after a pilot program last year, the series goes interactive, and is soliciting viewers' points of view. Viewers are encouraged to get out the family camcorder and film their own reaction to what they've seen. They'll run selected viewer commentary following the evening's program. Look for it.

© Pat Aufderheide

I N P R I N T

Out of the bottle

By Leora Tanenbaum

Am I a failed feminist if I covet the Wonderbra? Am I a bad woman if I sleep around, or decide to remain childless? Am I unfeminine if I wear a shapeless skirt instead of a tight mini? What if I opt for the mini, but need to lose 30 pounds?

Susan Douglas has perfectly captured the ever-present internal battles between femininity and feminism. Her vehicle is the history of American television, film and music from the early postwar years until today. In *Where the Girls Are*, her tone is playful but her message is serious: the mass media have made women "cultural schizophrenics" who "rebel against yet also submit to prevailing images about what a desirable, worthwhile woman should be." Pulled in opposite directions, she writes, women "are ambivalent toward femininity on the one hand, and feminism on the other."

Douglas—who teaches media studies at Hampshire College and writes regularly for *The Progressive*—is an appealing cultural commentator because she unabashedly situates herself within the history she constructs. Like many girls of her generation—the Baby Boom—she grew up reading *Seventeen* magazine and desperately wishing to be "just like Gidget—popular, cute and perky." In 1960, there were almost 12 million teenage girls in the United States. Advertisers, overjoyed with their demographic fortune, pitched a plethora of consumer goods that were specifically and uniquely designed for the teenage girl—who loved the attention, but was confused by the messages presented to her.

Where The Boys Are (1960), the movie from which Douglas takes her title, is a quintessential case in point. The story of four college girls in Florida for spring break, it is a

seeming morality tale about the dangers of premature sexuality. Melanie, who goes all the way with the first guy she meets—and then compounds her crime by chasing his best friend—ends up the victim of date rape. Her friend Merritt, by contrast, remains a virgin, but nonetheless has an admirably spunky, rebellious side. At the end of the film, she accepts the offer of her new boyfriend, Rider, to visit him at his Ivy League school.

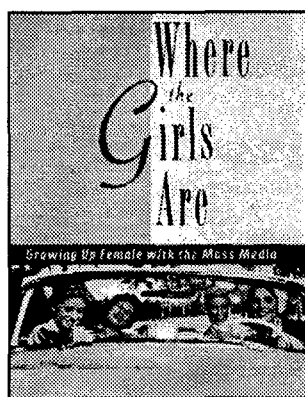
It's not clear her virginity will survive the trip. But if she does finally "go all the way," Douglas wonders, so what? "[W]ill it destroy her, or cost her his love?" Douglas asks. "We doubt it. So despite what happened to Melanie, it's simply not clear that pre-marital sex in all cases is bad, especially if you're smart and sensible, like Merritt." As Douglas tells it, moments of confusion like this one paved the way for feminist rebellion, making the movement "inevitable."

Douglas' own story perfectly illustrates the transformation. In 1964, she was a cheerleader and an avid Beatles fan, rolling her hair in massive curlers and scrubbing her face with Noxzema. A few short years later she had thrown out her bras and was hurling objects at her TV set during Nixon press conferences. Yet she still continued to shave her legs, read women's magazines and wear blusher. Even today, Douglas admits, in her characteristically wry style, she would "still rather have a root canal than appear in public in a bathing suit."

The mounting contradictions in the female role were at least tacitly acknowledged in a number of television shows of the mid-'60s, which attempted to show "the impending release of female sexual and political energy, while keeping it all safely in a straitjacket." Samantha of *Bewitched* (1964-72) and Jeannie of *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-70), for example, possessed magical powers and the ability to transform and overturn daily life. But they

were never allowed to wreak too much havoc, especially in the public sphere; the fearful men in their lives kept them in line—or, in Jeannie's case, in her bottle. In the end, though, the bottle could not remain corked. "For as we watched Darrin turned into a Yorkshire terrier, or Major Nelson transported to seventeenth-century Persia," Douglas writes, "we saw that male authority wasn't so impregnable or impressive at all."

Yet men in authority continued to belittle women's achievements. In 1970, ABC anchorman Howard Smith introduced a top story about the Women's Strike for



Where the Girls Are:
Growing Up Female
with the Mass Media
By Susan J. Douglas
Times Books
340 pp., \$23



Equality (at that time the largest feminist demonstration ever held in American history) by saying that “three things have been difficult to tame. The oceans, fools and women. We may soon be able to tame the ocean, but fools and women will take a little longer.” Douglas, aghast with the memory, notes drily, “The last thing the viewer saw was the phrase ‘braless bubbleheads’ projected on the right portion of the screen. Kinda made you wanna join right up.”

Male journalists, Douglas argues, did a tremendous disservice to feminism by playing up divisions among women, thus helping to reinforce “the stereotype that women were completely incompetent as politicians, technicians and organizers, and ... that they didn’t deserve to be active anywhere but in the kitchen, the bedroom and the nursery.” Douglas’ anger is justified, but she goes too far. There *are* many women who don’t accept the goals—or, at the very least, the label—of feminism. Douglas never addresses these women or their motivations; she speaks only to the politically enlightened. And while internal feminist strife has been

portrayed patronizingly, as the ultimate in catfights, there *were* in fact some pretty vicious battles among feminist leaders—especially the legendary Friedan-Steinem squabbles—and reporters had every right to cover them.

By the ’80s, according to Douglas, the feminist goal of equality was appropriated by corporate America. “Women’s liberation metamorphosed into female narcissism,” she writes, as broader political campaigns “collapsed into distinctly personal, private desires.” The ’80s fitness craze, in particular, emphasized the glamour of self-denial and control, helping to make women ashamed of their bodies and competitive with other women.

Today we are blessed—or cursed—with the image of the supermother. Like all the representations of women that came before it, the supermother contradicts the reality of women’s lives. “Nowhere is the gap between image and reality wider,” Douglas writes, “than the one separating the smiling, serene, financially comfortable and perfectly coiffed media mom from her frazzled, exhausted, sputum-covered, real-life counterpart.” When Ann Kelsey and Stuart Markowitz adopted a baby girl on *L.A. Law*, “[t]he only difference this baby seemed to make in their lives was that they struggled to find the right mobiles and nanny.” When Ann brought the baby to work, Douglas watched incredulously: “Where were Ann’s eyebags? How could she have the presence of mind to do anything, let alone concentrate on legal work,

if she has an infant who’s disrupted her sleep several times the night before? Why were there no unsightly milk blotches on the padded shoulders of her \$700 suit?”

Douglas’ teen enthusiasm gives way, by the end of the book, to politicized weariness. Sick of the competitive individualism promoted by *Buns of Steel* and disgusted by “busty bimbos advertising beer,” Douglas proudly informs us that her 4-year-old daughter is allowed to watch commercial television merely once a week, on Saturday mornings.

Her nostalgia surprises me. As she herself admits, the either/or choices presented to the ’90s woman who wants to “have it all” are nothing new; in fact, they are strikingly similar to the ones that surrounded the mothers of the Baby Boom. I guess it takes more than the latest issue of *Glamour* to mollify the frazzled woman who knows too well the costs of having it all. ◀

Leora Tanenbaum writes regularly on gender and culture for *In These Times*.

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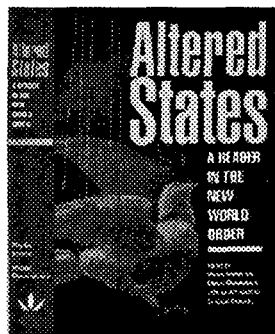
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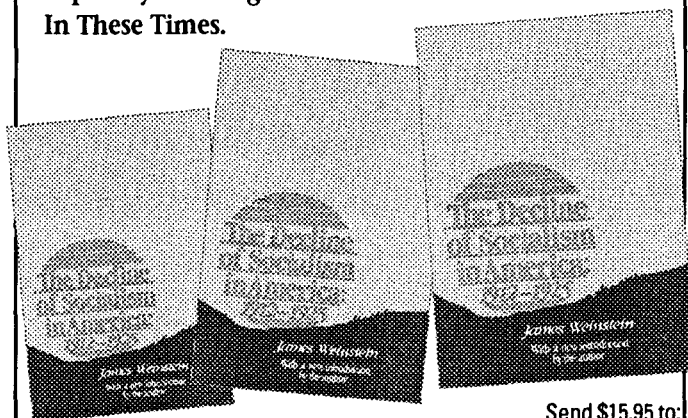
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I N P R I N T

Nuclear secrets

By Gar Alperovitz

Consider this extraordinary statement: "Careful scholarly treatment of the records and manuscripts opened over the past few years has greatly enhanced our understanding of why the Truman administration used atomic weapons against Japan. ... The consensus among scholars is that the bomb was not needed to avoid an invasion of Japan and to end the war within a relatively short time. It is clear that alternatives to the bomb existed *and that Truman and his advisers knew it.*" (Emphasis added.)

The writer is not a radical or revisionist. He is the conservative chief historian of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, J. Samuel Walker, summing up recent expert studies in the journal *Diplomatic History*. This government scholar adds: "It is certain that the hoary claim that the bomb prevented one-half million American combat deaths is unsupportable."

If such claims are indeed unsupportable—and the consensus among scholars today is that they are—why do they continue to retain such a strong hold over the American imagination? Part of the answer can be found in James Hershberg's new biography of James B. Conant—a book that uses the story of this eminent Cold Warrior to illuminate both the Hiroshima tale and the role of American military-scientific elites during the postwar years.

Conant, president of Harvard University from 1933 to 1953 and World War II head of the National Defense Research Committee, played a major role in the decisions that produced the Manhattan Project and the atomic bomb. He also played a major role in helping to persuade the American people that the use of the bomb had been necessary to bring the war to a quick close.

A slow trickle of criticism of the Hiroshima bombing began to surface shortly after the end of the war. The Feder-

al Council of Churches, in early 1946, called the bombing "morally indefensible"; *The Saturday Review of Literature* reported that a large number of atomic scientists had been against using the bomb on a city; in August *The New Yorker* published John Hersey's historic personal account of Hiroshima victims "too weary or too badly hurt to care that they were objects of the first great experiment in the use of atomic power."

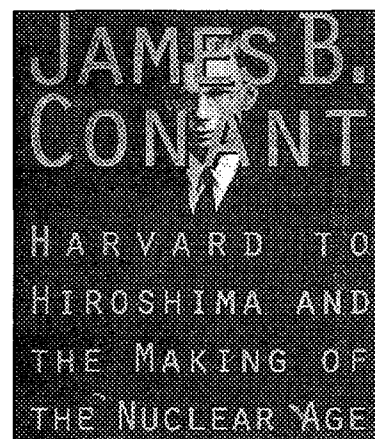
Worried that the growing criticism might undermine support for a new atomic arsenal he believed necessary to keep the peace, Conant decided to attempt what Hershberg calls a "pre-emptive strike" to shape public opinion.

With other members of the East Coast Establishment, Conant believed that "the best and the brightest" had a responsibility to lead—and that it was absolutely essential for "the American people to have confidence in their elected officials and their technical advisers on matters that cannot be discussed openly." Moreover, he had concluded as early as 1940 that the United States had to take on Great Britain's mantle of "top dog" in the international order, envisioning a postwar United States "armed to the teeth, belligerent and running the world."

Conant also had a personal stake in the issue. As a member of the 1945 Interim Committee set up to make recommendations concerning the atomic bomb, the Harvard president had proposed that "the most desirable target would be a vital war plant employing a large number of workers and closely surrounded by workers' houses."

Conant, Hershberg reveals, then persuaded Henry L. Stimson, the ailing former secretary of war, to write what became the standard defense of the decision. Aided by another Harvard man later to become famous in his own right, the 27-year-old McGeorge Bundy, Conant helped to prepare a powerful 1947 cover story in *Harper's* magazine that appeared under Stimson's name. The article became front-page news and was reprinted and widely distributed to newspapers and other periodicals free of charge. It shaped public understanding for decades.

As Hershberg underscores, the article's suggestion that the bomb had saved "over a million casualties" was no more than an assertion inserted into the article by Bundy and Stimson. This was not the article's



**James B. Conant:
Harvard to Hiroshima
and the Making of the
Nuclear Age**

By James G. Hershberg
Alfred A. Knopf
948 pp., \$35

only prevarication. During the war, Stimson (along with many other presidential advisers) had suggested to Truman that the war could likely be ended sooner if Japan's emperor were assured that he would be allowed to retain a titular role after his country's surrender. (As it turned out, of course, he *was* allowed to retain his title.) Conant made sure that discussion of this debate was carefully excluded from Stimson's published article.

Hershberg uses the shaping of the Hiroshima story to open a window on to one of his main concerns—the organization and manipulation of public opinion through concerted elite mobilization. Conant—like many in the Cold War establishment—devoted much of his life work to efforts to “guide” the people down the correct ideological pathways.

Time and again—as leader of the Committee for the Present Danger urging universal military service and troop deployments to Europe, and later in support of the Vietnam War—Conant diligently worked to help build the Cold War foreign policy consensus. His “philosophical predilection for urging Americans to trust authority,” Hershberg suggests, illuminates a particular form of high-level activity “combining outsider standing with insider connections, ostensibly independent, non-political and ‘non-partisan,’ yet closely coordinating behind the scenes with, and acting as an unofficial propaganda arm of, the government.”

This is neither a radical nor an angry book—which, in a sense, adds to the power of its critique. Hershberg, though critical of Conant, has a certain sympathy for the man and for those elites who felt “responsible” for the nation in the early Cold War. Conant had mixed feelings as well: he was deeply concerned about the need for international atomic controls, recognized the dangers of nuclear power and opposed the decision to develop the H-bomb. In a classified 1947 speech to the War College, he even advocated total nuclear disarmament and the elimination of all nuclear-related materials, arguing that “in the long run the United States, from a military point of view, would be very much better off if there were neither atomic bombs nor their equivalent in existence anywhere in the world.”

During the Sputnik era, Conant was also one of the first to call for a major investment in American schools—“for action, not hair-splitting arguments.” At Harvard, he initiated an ambitious scholarship program to open up the then deeply conservative Cambridge to middle-class students, actively supported the educational testing movement (as one way to recognize talent rather than connections) and opposed draft exemptions for those in college. Earlier, during the war, he even published a controversial



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article proposing the regular confiscation of inherited wealth once a generation.

Conant—who had gotten his start as a chemist working on poison gas during World War I—also tried for a while to limit military research contracts. He fretted inconclusively that the classified research he ultimately allowed on campus during the Korean War had corroded the ideals of independent scientific scholarship he affirmed. But, during the McCarthy era, he reversed his once strongly held stand on academic freedom and apparently took a centrist position that might be characterized as: “Don’t fire, but don’t hire Communists.” (I say “apparently” because Harvard’s 50-year secrecy rule is even more stringent than the FBI’s; others have argued that behind the scenes Conant’s administration passed information on the political views of his faculty to the FBI.)

Conant’s career peaked when Eisenhower named him high commissioner and then ambassador to West Germany. His support for postwar German rearmament, despite his own qualms about an independent German army, was typical of many Cold Warriors who only a few years earlier had led the fight against Hitler. Nonetheless, the cool Yankee professor never quite won the confidence of German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who very soon found ways to go over his head to Washington.

Conant was fully aware that his manipulative, secretive style of elite leadership involved a profound rejection of what he called the “old-fashioned teachings of popular democracy.” Hershberg’s book helps us more clearly understand the postwar Establishment and offers a challenging appraisal of the role of elites, of universities and of the state. And it helps to suggest the necessity of a different global stance for America. ◀

Gar Alperovitz, author of *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam*, is president of the National Center for Economic Alternatives and also a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies.

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the occasion exactly and appear to be intensely personal, sometimes by using such tricks as off-centered hand lettering instead of type. In order to match the proper sentiment-of-the-day, Hallmark must produce a number of different lines, each of which approach a huge array of emotion-worthy events from several different (largely generational) perspectives.

The "Crown" line appears to be Hallmark's standard product, the sort of thing people used to give each other 50 years ago. Featuring layers of thick paper, lace, gold lettering and long, "elegant" poems designed to cheer people up with rhyme, meter and noble feelings, these are the cards for oldsters, grouped under a number of religious categories and largely concerned with the death of relatives.

And then there's "Shoobox," the line for the rock'n'roll generations—twenty-something, thirty-something, forty-something. It's hip and vaguely risqué, with distorted cartoon figures that reflect every style from Zippy to Linda Barry and sentiments that include daring words like "boobs" and "butt." A number of "Shoobox" cards feature cartoons of a snarling old woman, duded up in sunglasses and cigarette, offering traditional Hallmark sentiments with a pseudo-abrasive edge: "Feeling sick? Well, remember.... Feed a cold, starve a fever. Moon a neighbor."

Although it may seem to represent a big change from the smarmy Hallmark of years past, "Shoobox" is in fact nothing more than the company's concession to the rise of commodified deviance: when Pepsi, Burger King and Chevrolet are calling on Americans to "break the rules," how could Hallmark lag behind? They couldn't. With "Shoobox" they have simply updated the clichés, replacing the saccharine religiosity of bygone cards with smirking MTV cuteness.

Despite this sort of warmly endearing wash-and-wear rudeness, Hallmark's heart still belongs to the bland, the inoffensive, the cute. "Shoobox" cards may carry the legend: "A tiny little division of Hallmark" on the back, but like the throngs of people dressed up in rebel costumes that I watched walk through the Hallmark store, their piquancy is contrived, creamy, utterly safe. Boys in earrings and ponytails; girls in green hair, mohawks and leather jackets, all of them flocking to shops to purchase prefabricated emblems of their disaffection with prefabrication—Hallmark cards to proclaim their alienation from the Hallmark way of life.

"Between You and Me," a line of cards for the poetically inclined, foregoes art for literature: each one offers a long, wordy dollop of free verse to express such intimacies as "Take One Day at a Time," "I Want Us to Be Happy Again" or "Sorry I've Been Such a Grouch Lately." And each poem (featuring inspired lines like "Sometimes I wonder / How you put up with me / especially the way / I've been lately") is duly signed by its author—a

feature no doubt necessary to reassure card buyers that this here is *real* poetry.

Kansas City is the home of the Hallmark Corp. Years ago the town was notorious for its wide-open rawness, its jazz and its barbecue. Harry Truman came from near there. So did the Populists, whose outraged tirades so annoyed a nation (and, later on, its historians) enamored of visions of beneficent capitalist progress.

Today Kansas City is better known as the home of the world's first shopping mall and one of its cleanest amusement parks than for its straightforward talk. The spirit of the euphemism now reigns supreme over its vast suburbs, which are given such whimsical, pseudo-aristocratic names as Charlemagne Manor, Patrician Woods, Harwycke Upper Bracket, and (the entry of the Hall family, Hallmark's owners) Hallbrook Farms. There is no rush hour, since downtown doesn't really exist anymore; no mass transit, since everyone has a car (some suburbs have even done away with sidewalks and hire policemen to harass the odd pedestrian). The sports teams have departed for the suburbs.

The last remaining '30s-era jazz club was demolished a few years ago to make way for a vacant lot; there was no mourning of any kind in the city's booster media.

In Kansas City, as in every declining Midwestern metropolis, the city fathers are desperately seeking a way to revive the flagging fortunes of downtown. Sooner or later the elders of every such town settle on the same solution: build some floating casinos and a gigantic convention center! In Kansas City, they have good reason to believe that this approach might actually succeed. After all, this is the city that built its economy on the airy stuff of sentiment. Hallmark has even shown the way in urban renewal. The company's Crown Center development is one of the city's proudest features, uniting under one vast roof an upscale shopping mall, some restaurants, a skating rink, a hotel, the Hallmark production complex, the Halls' own department store and a strange, steaming rainforest replica, complete with indoor waterfall and thriving jungle vegetation.

So who needs industry when you can have glee? Who needs factories when you can have malls? And who needs the raucous existential screech of jazz when you can have Precious Moments? Hallmark is pointing the way to our nation's future; it only remains to be seen whether we have the warmth, the feeling, the sympathy, the friendliness, the tears to see it through.

Tom Frank is an editor of *The Baffler*. An earlier version of this essay appeared in Chicago's *Grey City Journal*.



I N T H E E N D

By Tom Frank

We live in an age of cheap sentiment, a time in which exaggerated, maudlin expressions of even the most pedestrian emotions have become a fixture of public culture.

Even while we consume record quantities of vicarious movie violence, we seem to have developed amazingly thin skins, moved to tears by almost anything when a TV camera is present. One pole of our mass culture immerses us in a world of savage groin-kicks and shocking drive-by shootings; the other suggests that it's OK to cry—especially when others are around to enjoy smothering our sniffles with coos and hugs. And somewhere at this end of the cultural axis is the Hallmark Corp., purveyors of sentiment to the nation's emotionally clumsy, tongue-tied millions.

The great accomplishment of Hallmark is not that it has single-handedly made the maudlin into our national emotion: not even the Smurfs could do that. Rather, it has successfully transformed emotions themselves into consumer products—building a marketplace in the space between people where speech and letters used to be, a whole product hierarchy from our inability to communicate with one another.

The key to Hallmark's operation has been convincing the public to believe two wildly contradictory premises. We are told on the one hand that we need to express our every thought in a florid and public manner, but on the other hand that our own talents aren't sufficient to do justice to our emotions: we must "give the very best" (as Hallmark's corporate motto puts it) in order to make the emotional grade.

Once we've been convinced that we need to hire Hallmark as an intermediary for our emotional utterances, the company's task becomes simpler: to convince us to use their good offices for every conceivable nano-event. Thus Hallmark has sponsored a fantastic proliferation of card-giving occasions for which prefabricated sentiments are readily available.

During a recent visit to a local Hallmark store I found cards categorized under headings like "Your efforts are paying off," "Thanks! I owe you one," "I'm sorry you're hurting," and "During your treatment." This last was particularly evocative, and I wondered how many of my life's events could have been enhanced by the generic outpouring within: "Sometimes it must seem like / the cure is worse than the illness. / I know you'll be happy when the treatment is over." I bought five copies and mailed them off to all the people on my dissertation committee.

Since Hallmark cards are mass-market products, they must be general enough to appeal to a diverse audience. But at the same time they must be specific enough to nail

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